The Bulletin
2024/25

The Canadian Society of Biblical Studies
La société canadienne des études bibliques

Volume 84
Alexander Chantziantoniou, Editor

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Alexander Chantziantoniou
Crandall University

The Bulletin is an annual publication of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies/La société canadienne des études bibliques.

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Canadian Society of Biblical Studies
Executive Committee 2025–2026 Comité executif de
La Société canadienne des études bibliques

PRESIDENT:	**Alicia Batten** Conrad Grebel University College
VICE-PRESIDENT:	**Fiona Black** Mount Allison University
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:	**Mark Leuchter** Temple University
TREASURER & MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:	**Laura Hare** University of Toronto
PROGRAMME COORDINATOR:	**Anne Létourneau** Université de Montréal
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER:	**Alexander Chantziantoniou** Crandall University
STUDENT LIASON OFFICER:	**Laurence Darsigny-Trépanier** Université de Montréal

Canadian Society of Biblical Studies/Société canadienne des études bibliques
Annual General Meeting
Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities/Congrès des sciences sociales et humanités
Tuesday, June 3, 2025
George Brown College, Toronto, ON

Approval of the Agenda. Mark Boda moves; Fiona Black seconded. All approved.[1]

Approval of Minutes from 2024 AGM. Mark Boda moves; Fiona Black seconded. All approved

PRESIDENT'S REPORT (Erin Runions)

- Gratitude to the Exec Committee for all the work they have done
- President has continued to work with the ad hoc EDID committee, which the Exec renewed for another year
- Continued work on macro and micro aggressions and organized a session for chairs of this year's meeting
- Wrote a letter in support of York University Religious Studies (and others) given freezing admission into their programs

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT (Alicia Batten)

- Began by expressing gratitude to outgoing Exec members – Erin, Ken, Matt
- Nominations – MOTIONS
    - Vice-president: Fiona Black, Mount Allison University – Christine M. closes nominations; Alicia moves; Mark Boda seconds; all approved
    - Programme Coordinator: Anne Létourneau, Université de Montréal; Christine M. closes nominations; Mark seconds; all approved
    - Communications Officer (for a two-year term): Alexander Chantziantoniou, Crandall University – Christine M. closes nominations; Alicia moves, who seconded – all support

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY REPORT (Laura Hare)

- Moments of Silence: G. Peter Richardson, John Van Seters, Albert Pietersma
- New Members – MOTION – 22 new members. Laura makes a motion; Colleen seconds; all in favour
- A reminder to mention a nominator when seeking to become a member
- 154 paid members – decrease from last year due to last year's LXX colloquium when we had 170 total

[1] Due to some record-keeping issues, an attendance list is unfortunately unavailable for the 2025 AGM.

TREASURER REPORT (Laura Hare)

- Financial Report – see attached documents
- Reminder to students to apply for Neufeld funds
- Expressed gratitude to Neufeld donors
- Reminded people to apply for awards going forward
- Motion to accept – Laura; seconded by Rebecca Idestrom; approved by all

ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE REPORT (Laura Hare)

- Report submitted – see attached documents
- $387,813 total funds
- Encourages people to think about joining Endowment Committee if one has interest in this
- Investments are doing well, despite market volatility
- Encourages donations to any and all funds, but especially Neufeld Travel Funds for students
- Falconer Award has been bumped up to $2500 due to health of endowment
- Mark asked if Neufeld is pay in and pay out, not an endowment. So we still need donations on it
- Moved to accept – Laura – John Kloppenborg seconds; all in favour
- Reminder to attend CSPS talk by Annette Reed

SECRETARY'S REPORT (Mark Leuchter)

- Nothing to report

COMMUNICATION OFFICER REPORT (Matthew Thiessen)

- I encourage all of you to let the communication's officer know when you have breaking news about a publication or major achievement, whether your own, a colleague's, or a student's. It's one way we can show the world the wonders of the CSBS. It's especially important at this point in time, I believe, as scholars around the world look to places outside of the US for scholarly conversations and community.
- Twitter: stagnant at just under 700 followers
- Facebook: 1000 to 1100 followers
- Added Bluesky: 71 followers
- Again, one major way we seek to communicate with members is via our email list, which contains about 500 emails. If you are not receiving emails, please let me know today and I will be sure to add you. At the same time, only about 50% of the people on our email list read our emails, so some of you might be having email sent to junk mail or filtered out.
- While I am stepping down at the Communications Officer, I will be sending out one last email asking for membership news related to 2024 accomplishments. It would be great to see as many people as possible share their accomplishments so that they can be collated in one place as a testimony to the fruitfulness of our society.

- Finally, we love to celebrate internally the strengths of our research by handing out different awards every year – the Jeremias and Founders Award, celebrating student accomplishments, the Falconer Award, the Wagner Award, and then our two Book Awards, the Scott and the Beare Awards. I encourage each of you to think of applying or encouraging others to apply or to nominate others for these various awards. Alicia Batten, our Vice President, has the joyous duty of announcing the Falconer and book award winners for 2025.
- Book awards announced (Alicia Batten)

PROGRAMME COORDINATOR'S REPORT (Ken Ristau)
- Ken expressed gratitude for area coordinator from GBC, who was very helpful
- Reminds people of the short program which is available to consult with ease
- 53 presenters – down significantly from last two years. 71 at McGill (not counting LXX colloquium); 74 at York two years ago
- Gratitude for the programme committee – Bruce W.; Ian W.; Eva M. – organized well-thought out sessions
- Encourage submission for future years
- 12 new member presenters; 18 students; 22 women presenters – nearing parity

STUDENT LIASON OFFICER (Laurence Darsigny-Trépanier)
- Student lunch and panel earlier today
- Looking for someone to volunteer after this coming year

OTHER BUSINESS (Erin Runions)
- Reminder about women's lunch tomorrow at St Lawrence Market
- Canadian travel to the U.S. (Greg Fewster)
    - Convo about travelling to the US for SBL and other professional activities – a chat during the reception
- Discussion of annual meeting next year
    - A couple of weeks ago the Federation informed us all that their negotiations with an institution fell through and so we have no host for next year. The Federation is offering support for online meetings.
    - Exec met yesterday and preferred an in-person meeting. Exec received an invitation to go to Mount Allison University in Sackville, NB. Most will have to fly to Moncton and then find a way to get 30 minutes or so down to Sackville. Fiona Black has examined costs of hosting it there and it is quite cheap and there are ample accommodations. We have no fixed date as of yet but we will shortly.
    - Gratitude to Fiona for this offer
    - Colleen asked about convos with other religious studies societies – TST wants to host and we believe it is important to go east since we haven't in years and we have been in Toronto quite a bit. While we can't meet together next year, Colleen (and others) have suggested trying to work with other religious studies societies to meet together in future if possible

    - De Gruyter publisher mentioned trying to figure out how to be represented if only one society meets, but more societies would help de Gruyter justify sending a full religious studies rep
    - Christine Mitchell – again stressed working with CSSR
    - Zeba Crook – is this the time to get out of the Federation
    - Leaving the Federation is easy – joining again is tough
    - Ehud asks about hybrid meeting. Exec talked about it but had not come to a conclusion. It would help those who cannot afford to travel
    - Coastal conferences decrease attendance, so perhaps CCSR
    - Executive will meet early in summer to move these convos forward and make decisions ASAP
- Conversation with Lana Galbraith, Manager—Member Engagement, Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences | Fédération des sciences humaines
    - What is Federation doing to support humanities and social sciences here in Canada – e.g., York? Dire situation – we need help – Canadian society needs these to continue to be strong
        - National organization which makes it hard to respond to individual institutional situations or even provincial situations
        - Looks at trends to see what can be done nationally
    - Question about the costs of Congress – costs keep going up – is this the ongoing trend? Is it merely inflation – A/V; receptions, etc. What can Federation do to help out.
    - Why did negotiations fail this year for 2026? What is going to happen going forward?
        - Close to an agreement – difficult since 2020
        - Possibility of every other year
        - Smaller groups – easier to work with
        - Planning for Congress 2027
        - Also an in person meeting next year for 2000 people, but there is little info on it
    - Lana – this is her fourth congress as Manager for Member engagement

ADJOURNMENT

- Motion to Adjourn. Mark Boda moves; Kim Stratton seconded. All approved.

ADDENDA – MEMBERSHIP and ENDOWMENT REPORTS
CSBS Membership Report, June 3, 2026

1. New Members
In the 2024-2025 year, 22 new members joined CSBS.

Name	Membership Type	Nominator
Isaiah Allen	Full	Roy Jeal
Jonathan Campbell	Full	Stéphane Beaulieu
Stephen Chester	Full	Marion Taylor
Yohan Cho	Student	Matthew Thiessen
Nicola Denzey Lewis	Full	William Arnal
Ana Golland	Student	Laura Hare
Tyler Horton	Student	Jean Maurais
Stephen Hurley	Student	Mona Tokarek LaFosse
Emily Reina Kerkhof	Student	Xenia Chan
Namhyo Kim	Student	Cynthia Westfall Long
John Lee	Student	Laura Hare
Allan Loder	Full	Terry Donaldson
Kem Luther	Retired	Laura Hare
Helen Mak	Student	Laura Hare
Thandazani Mhlanga	Student	Laura Hare
Naomi Rey	Student	Dirk Buchner
Grace Richards	Student	Kimberly Stratton
Randall Shandroski	Student	Lissa Wray Beal
JodiLynn Spargur	Student	Ryan Turnbull
Jasmine Wiens	Student	Christine Mitchell
Wing-Chiu Wong	Student	Colleen Shantz
Carol Xu	Student	Marion Taylor

2. Notes
There are currently 154 paid-up members, of whom 136 paid their membership fees since September 1, 2024 (i.e., in the current fiscal year). This is a noticeable decrease compared to last year: at this time last year, there were 170 paid-up members. However, last year's numbers can be attributed at least in part to the LXX Colloquium held during our annual conference, which encouraged many Septuagintal scholars to join us for a year. This year's numbers lie between the numbers seen in 2022 and 2023, so the decrease is not a major concern.

CSBS Financial Report, June 3, 2025

1. Finances: General and Restricted Funds

The General Fund covers all of the Society's annual operating costs, while the Restricted Funds cover specifically designated expenses, such as book awards and student prizes. The Society pays for all of its annual operating costs and Restricted Funds expenses from an account with Royal Bank, which, as of June 1, has a balance of $29441.59. An approximate explanation of the society's 2024-2025 General Funds and Restricted Funds thus far is laid out in the two charts below: Statement of Income (Fig. 1); and Statement of Expenses (Fig. 2). Our fiscal year runs from September 1 to August 31.

As the charts make clear, at the moment we have an deficit of revenue to expenses in the General Fund of about $2000; moreover, there are a number of expenditures that are yet to be made; mainly relating to executive travel. Executive travel will be a bit less expensive this year, since a few of us do not need to travel too far, and we are doing our best to keep our costs down. The final conference costs remain uncertain as many adjustments have been made to invoices thus far, but it looks as though our conference costs will be greater than our conference registration revenue, as there are many fewer registrants this year than last. However, we will likely receive at least a few more membership renewals in this fiscal year. I anticipate that we will end up with a deficit of a few thousand dollars; the final financial report will be available in the 2025 bulletin.

Last year, CCSR had technological problems with getting members access to the SR journal and did not charge us for SR as a result. However, they have now solved the problem and thus we did pay that fee this year.

As you can see, the Federation and Congress have continued in the pricing trend seen last year. The reception cost is similar to last year's (which was a huge jump up from the previous year). George Brown has decided to charge AV for every room booking, whether or not AV was requested. This includes the reception. We did not know this until a few weeks ago. This means that although they have charged less than McGill for AV per room, the AV costs are about the same as last year.

Overall, I expect our expenditures this year to be similar to last year's expenditures, with some increase from inflation (and the return of the SR payment), but our revenue is much decreased both in membership fees and in conference registration. While we did not feel the need to raise membership fees this past year, it will be necessary to raise membership fees next year to match inflation. The fees for students/contracts/renewed will go up by $5 (both for those getting SR through CSBS and for those who are not) and the fees for full members will go up by $15 (both for those getting SR through CSBS and for those who are not). This will go into effect on September 1, 2025. In recent years, it has been the practice to transfer about $2500-$3000 from the Endowment Fund to the bank account to help cover the deficit in the operating budget. For now, we have deemed this transfer to be unnecessary, but it may become necessary next year.

2. Charts

Figure 1: Statement of Income

Income: Sept. 1, 2024 to Aug. 31, 2025					**2023-2024**
General Fund:					
Membership Dues	**#**	**$/pp**	**$$$**	**Total:**	
- Full members	53	$ 103.20	$ 5,469.60		62
- Full no *SR*	12	$ 82.20	$ 986.40		18
- Contract	7	$ 39.75	$ 278.25		6
- Contract no *SR*	3	$ 28.90	$ 86.70		4
- Retired	18	$ 39.75	$ 715.50		20
- Retired no *SR*	2	$ 28.90	$ 57.80		1
- Student	39	$ 39.75	$ 1,550.25		52
- Student no *SR*	6	$ 28.90	$ 173.40		9
- Total:	140		$ 9,317.90	$ 9,317.90	$ 11,383.10
Conference Registration			$ 4,068.00	$ 4,068.00	$ 5,200.00
Conference Financial Assistance					$ 520.00
Total Income General Fund:				**$ 13,385.90**	**$ 17,103.10**
Restricted Funds:					
Dietmar Neufeld Travel Fund				$ 2,130.00	$ 1,100.00
Falconer				$ 3,500.00	$ 3,500.00
Craigie Lecture Sponsors					
-The Federation					
-CSPS					
-CCSR			$ 1,000.00		
-Craigie Total:				$ 1,000.00	$ 500.00
General Endowment				$ 260.25	$ 160.25
Beare Award					$ -
Founders Prize					
Jeremias Prize					
R.B.Y. Scott Award					
Total Income Restricted Funds:				**$ 6,890.25**	**$ 5,260.25**

Figure 2: Statement of Expenses

Expenses: Sept. 1, 2024 to Aug. 31, 2025			**2023-2024**
General Fund		**Total:**	**Total:**
Accounting		$ 4,173.75	$ 3,832.50
Bank Charges and Interac Fees		$ 80.40	$ 80.40
PayPal Fees		$ 211.47	$ 247.35
Canadahelps.org Fee		$ 120.00	$ 120.00
Conference AV bookings		$ 1,271.25	$ 1,293.45
CSBS Reception		$ 4,603.74	$ 4,863.44
Executive Travel and Dinner		$ 2,102.78	$ 2,649.74
Federation Dues		$ 1,724.16	$ 1,700.82
French translation		$ 150.00	$ -
Office, Printing, Postage		$ -	$ -
Website		$ 960.00	$ 960.00
Student Lunch		$ 269.08	$ 288.11
SR Subscription		$ 1,730.00	$ -
Total Expenses:		**$ 17,396.63**	**$ 16,035.81**
General Fund Total: Income minus Expenses		**$ (4,010.73)**	**$ 1,057.79**
Restricted Funds:			
	Breakdown	**Total:**	**Spent**
Craigie Lecture			
-Travel and Accommodation			
-Honorarium			
- Audio/Visual			
-Craigie total			$ 3,665.38
Student Awards			
-Prize money	$ 500.00		
-Travel	$ 97.37		
-Student Awards Total:		$ 597.37	$ 645.55
Joint lecture with CSPS		$ 500.00	$ -
Book Awards		$ 1,000.00	$ 1,000.00
Wagner Award		$ -	$ 500.00
Falconer Award		$ 2,500.00	$ 1,500.00
D Neufeld Travel Award		$ 2,721.82	$ 2,789.66
Restricted Funds Total Expenses		**$ 7,319.19**	**$ 10,100.59**

3. Endowment Report (from Bob Derrenbacker)

Endowment Committee Members: Robert Derrenbacker (Chair), Richard Ascough, Mark Leuchter (CSBS Executive Secretary), Michele Murray, Laura Hare (CSBS Treasurer), Wayne McCready (Past Chair, non-voting)

The endowment for the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies (CSBS) is divided into two different funds: The Inaugural Endowment Fund (established in 1998) and the Falconer Endowment Fund (established in 2018). The total current market value for both endowment funds is $387,813 (as of 28 May 2025). Both the Inaugural Endowment funds and the Falconer Endowment funds are invested through Acumen Capital, working with our longtime financial advisor, Frank Walker.

The Endowment Committee reports on the Endowment Portfolio to the CSBS Executive twice annually (January/February and May/June).

The **Inaugural Endowment** has two primary objectives:

1. to assist in providing a sustainable financial base for Society initiatives through an endowment
2. to make funds available on an annual basis – through earned income from investments – for Society expenses (determined by the Treasurer and the CSBS Executive)

The Inaugural Endowment reflects a 30-year rolling plan investment strategy. Specifically, the portfolio has the following primary categories of investment (current market values provided for 28 May 2025, with a total value of $288,515):

1. Fixed Income (including cash/cash equivalents):	$64,057 (22%)
2. Mutual Funds:	$34,623 (12%)
3. Alternative Equities (Auto-Callable Notes):	$18,124 (6%)
4. Common Stock Equities:	$171,711 (60%)

From 1998 to June 2025 the market value of the portfolio increased nominally by over 400% from the original investment of $56,425 for an annual growth of approximately 13% over 27 years. In addition, approximately $112,000 has been earned during that period through investment income to meet Society expenses or to be re-invested.

Importantly, the Society's modified dividend growth investment strategy means that annual dividend income from the common stock equities portion of the portfolio is projected to be $8,062 for 2025.

The **Falconer Endowment Fund** (established 2018) was created to provide support for a short-term research project. As of 28 May 2025, the market value of this endowment was $99,198 as indicated below, with a projected income of $3,145 for 2025.

1. Fixed Income (including money market fund/cash):	$5,049 (5%)
2. Common Stock Equities:	$87,465 (88%)
3. Alternative Equities (Auto-Callable Notes):	$6,684 (7%)

2024 Membership News

1. RECENT PUBLICATIONS: BOOKS

Doane, Sébastien. *Reading the Bible amid the Environmental Crisis: Interdisciplinary Insights to Ecological Hermeneutics*. Landham: Lexington Books/Bloomsbury, 2024.

Hare, Laura. *Men and Women Talking: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Gendered Speech in Biblical Narrative*. Biblical Tools and Studies 47. Leuven: Peeters, 2024.

Jeal, Roy R. *Exploring Colossians: Living the New Reality*. RRA 5. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2024.

Jeal, Roy R., ed. *Exploring Sublime Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*. ESEC 28. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2024.

Van Dam, Cornelis. *"Tell the Next Generation": Essays on Christian Education at Home and in School*. Barrhead, AB/Hamilton, ON: Providence Books and Press/Lucerna Publications, 2024.

2. RECENT PUBLICATIONS: ARTICLES, CHAPTERS, PUBLISHED CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS, ETC.

Ascough, Richard S. "Rivalry in the Inscriptions and the New Testament." Pages 263–273 in *Ancient Literature for New Testament Study* (ALNTS), vol. 10, *Inscriptions, Papyri, and Other Artifacts*. Edited by James R. Harrison and E. Randolph Richards. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024.

Ascough, Richard S. "Whither Bylaws: Association Regulations, Then and Now." Toronto Journal of Theology (2024) 234–244.

Ascough, Richard S. and Christina Gousopoulos, "Hope for the Hopeless (1 Thess 4:13): Imagining Death in the Papyri." Pages 147–164 in *Everyday Life in Graeco-Roman Times: Documentary Papyri and the New Testament: Essays in Honour of Peter Artz-Graebner*. Edited by Christina M. Kreinecker, John S. Kloppenborg, and James R. Harrison. Leiden: Brill, 2024.

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Black, Fiona C. “Contextual Biblical Interpretation: Bodily Inflections and Affective Futures.” Pages 345–60 in *Challenging Contextuality: Bibles and Biblical Scholarship in Context*. Edited by Hannah Strømmen, Peter-Ben Smit, Louise Lawrence and Charlene Van Der Walt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024.

Blumell, L. H. “Another Receipt for the Poll-Tax from Elephantine.” *Pylon: Editions and Studies of Ancient Texts* 5 (2024): 1–4.

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Blumell, L. H., and K. Hull. “A Coptic Epitaph for Apa Simothe of Tiloj.” *IWNW: Journal of the faculty of Archaeology at Ain-Shams University* 3 (2024): 29–44.

Blumell, L.H., and K. Hull. “A Ptolemaic Petition from a ‘Judeo-Egyptian’ (Ἰουδαιοαιγύπτιος).” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 75 (2024): 217–233.

Braun, Willi. “The Oldest Past of Christianity: Dead or Alive?” *Religion & Theology* 31 (2024): 11–28.

Doane, Sébastien. “L’Agneau que donc je suis : l’indistinction du devenir-disciple en Jean.” *RELIER* 31/1 (2023 paru 2024).

Doane, Sébastien. “Cartographie écopoétique des visages du Cantique des Cantiques comme agencements plus qu’humains.” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 80/1 (2024): 207–228.

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Doane, Sébastien. “Même les bêtes sauvages se tournent vers toi, vulnérabilité animale en Joël 1–2.” Pages 174–189 in *La vulnérabilité de l'animal en question*. Edited by M. Pelé et C. Vialle. Paris: Cerf, 2024.

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Maurais, Jean. “From Exodus to Deuteronomy? A Study on Interdependence in the Greek Pentateuch.” Pages 121–142 in *Themes and Texts, Exodus and Beyond*. Edited by Robert J. V. Hiebert, J. Numada, D. Chang, and K. S. Baek. LSTS 101 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2024).

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Parks, Sara, Meredith Warren, and Shayna Sheinfeld. “Jewish and Christian Women in the Ancient Mediterranean: Publications.” *Ancient Jew Review* (2024).

Runions, Erin. “Reception Studies and the Hebrew Bible.” In *The Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) in Five Minutes*. Edited by Philippe Guillame and Diana V. Edelman. Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2024.

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Schellenberg, Ryan S. “The Brothers in the Praetorium: Syntax and History in Philippians 1:12–14.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 86 (2024): 550–71.

Schellenberg, Ryan S. “‘Were Not Our Hearts Burning Within Us?’ (Luke 24:32): Dysregulated Passions, Righteous Fervour, and an Emotional Regime Change in the Roman Empire.” *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 8 (2024): 175–97.

Thiessen, Matthew. “Ritual Impurity.” Pages 445–56 in *The Next Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Edited by James Crossley and Chris Keith. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024.

Thiessen, Matthew. “Ritual Purity and Holiness.” Pages 302–8 in *Behind the Scenes of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. Edited by T. J. Lang, Bruce Longenecker, and Elizabeth Shively. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024.

Thiessen, Matthew (and Joshua Paul Smith). “The Gospel of Luke within Judaism.” Pages 139–51 in *Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by Karin Hedner Zetterholm and Anders Runesson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2024.

Van Dam, Cornelis. “The Messianic Office of David, whom God called His Son.” *Unio Cum Christo* 10 (2024) 12–32.

3. DISSERTATIONS COMPLETED

Chantziantoniou, Alexander. “Paul and the Politics of Idolatry: Ancient Mediterranean Cult Images and Iconic Ritual in the Letters of Paul.” PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2024.

Mekhael, Fady. “Ascended Jesus and Cultic Atonement: Reading Luke-Acts within Second Temple Judaism.” PhD diss., McMaster University, 2024.

4. APPOINTMENTS, PROMOTIONS, HONOURS

Batten, Alicia J. Associate Editor, *New Testament Studies*.

Batten, Alicia J. Board Member, Canadian Friends of the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem.

Chantziantoniou, Alexander. Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, Crandall University.

Chantziantoniou, Alexander. 2024 Paul J. Achtemeier Award for New Testament Scholarship (Society of Biblical Literature) for “The Politics of Paul’s Image Parodies: Material Epiphany, Human-Divine Reciprocity, and Social Power.”

MacDonald, Margaret. November 2024, Elected as Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

MacDonald, Margaret. 2024–2026 SSHRC Insight Development Grant ($61,092). With Syed Adnan Hussain as Co-Investigator, Expanding the family in Christianity and Islam: Intersectional and Decolonizing Perspectives.

Maurais, Jean. Adjunct Professor, McGill University, School of Religious Studies (2024–2027).

Murray. Michele. 2024 Catholic Media Association First Place Award, Scripture — Academic Studies for *Wisdom Commentary: Tobit* (Liturgical Press, 2023).

Parks, Sara. Inducted into the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (Society for New Testament Studies).

Parks, Sara. 2024 University Research and Publication Award (St. Francis Xavier University) for “The Greek Hat: 2 Maccabees 4:12 as a Euphemism for Reverse Circumcision."

Parks, Sara, Shayna Sheinfeld, and Meredith J. C. Warren. British and Irish Association for Jewish Studies "Best Book” Award (Honorable Mention) for *Jewish and Christian Women in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Routledge, 2022).

Runions, Erin. President, Canadian Society of Biblical Studies/Société Canadienne des Études Bibliques.

Schellenberg, Ryan S. Visiting Research Fellow, Religion and Politics Cluster of Excellence, University of Münster, June–July 2024

Thiessen, Matthew. 2024 Life Worth Living Faculty Course Development Fellowship ($15,000), Yale Center for Faith & Culture and the John Templeton Foundation.

2025 CSBS/SCÉB Presidential Address
George Brown College, Toronto, ON
June 3, 2025

The Carceral Afterlives of Isaiah 66:24 and the Question of the Human

Erin Runions

Abstract

The CSBS/SCÉB is one of the longest standing humanities societies in Canada, but what is our relationship to the larger humanities today? If the discipline and the Society are to flourish, biblical scholars may need to be intentional about contributing to larger discussions in the humanities. In ethnic studies, Indigenous studies, feminist, gender and sexuality studies, and the larger discipline of biblical studies and religious studies, one such conversation is about the category of the "human." Drawing on these deliberations and recent work to this end in biblical studies, this lecture considers the role of biblical studies in defining the category and place of the human. I show how biblical scholarship about one biblical text contributes to the exclusion of the "criminal" from conditions of the human. I follow the carceral afterlives of Isaiah 66:24, with its expulsion of rebels to unquenchable fire and undying worms. Over many centuries, the morbid dynamics of Isaiah 66:24 were transformed so that the valley of Hinnom—the presumed geographic referent for Isaiah 66:24 and the early Christian idea of Gehenna—became a garbage dump where criminals were executed and burned. Progressively embellished in philological commentary about Gehenna from the seventeenth century onward, imagined scenarios were taken as fact and incorporated into theological controversies about hell in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the U.S. and Canada. Association of criminals, hell, and prisons in these debates contributes to an ethos where carceral systems can treat mostly racialized people—and in Canada disproportionately Indigenous and migrant people—as less than human. Finally, I consider other ways to read this verse.

Introduction

The humanities seem to be under duress in Canada. We've certainly seen that dramatically this year at York University. In his 2024 CSBS/SCÉB Presidential address, Richard Ascough (2024) noted that the CSBS/SCÉB is one of the oldest humanities societies in Canada. What does our status as a foundational society mean for the way that we engage with the humanities?

Attacks on the humanities are not new of course. Articles on "saving the humanities" have appeared in regular intervals since World War II. In 1948, in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, newspaper editor B. K. Sandwell reviewed *The Humanities in Canada*, a report of the Humanities Research Council. His review was titled "Saving the Humanities." In it he lamented the underfunding and under-promotion of the humanities at the University of Toronto and in the Canadian university system. He read it as an economic problem of supply and demand. There was not, he argued, enough market demand for humanities degrees. He suggested that the best way to save the humanities was to *invest* in it. To quote,

> An increase in expenditure on humanistic research is the one effective and immediate way of increasing…the capacity of the Canadian market to absorb humanistically educated persons at the market rate. Nor is the effect limited to the money actually paid to the humanistic researchers; their mere presence in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg or Quebec strengthens the intellectual *milieus,* and encourages a taste for the humanities in other people, and induces in the community a greater respect, and even in due course a greater willingness to pay, for humanistic knowledge. (1948, 141)

It is not just a matter of creating supply, Sandwell argued, it is a matter of creating the interest and respect that produces *demand* for the humanities.

Since biblical studies tends not to be big on dollars, we need to create interest and demand. We need to invest intellectually. Certainly, if the humanities are offered, they create their own demand. As we know, degrees in humanities contribute to creativity, analysis, knowledge base, critical insight, and ethics. Ideally, students in our biblical studies classes will be motivated to further engagement in the humanities, whether that be in Classics, Ethnic Studies, Literature, Gender and Sexuality Studies, or History. Even so, biblical studies has to show *how* it contributes to the humanities and to the critiques raised therein. Sometimes, unfortunately, the field can seem siloed from these larger questions. I suggest investment through critique, including self-critique, and through projects richly framed in conversation with larger humanities questions. This approach will not solve monetary problems, but even if there was all the money in the world, the field must be relevant to a wide range of interests for programs to continue to be respected and funded.

One such critique raised in the humanities is about the category and place of "the human," or more specifically, whether the purported universality of the human—and any epistemology or ontology that assumes it—is undercut by its exclusion of racialized people. In Black Studies, feminist philosopher Sylvia Wynter famously drew on Franz Fanon to argue that Black people have been excluded from the enlightenment idea of the human or "Man." She links the historically evolving binaries of Christian and non-Christian, colonizer and colonized, free person and slave, human and non-human. She diagnoses the "reinvention of medieval Europe's Untrue Christian Other to its normative True Christian Self, as that of the Human Other to its new "descriptive statement" of the ostensibly only normal human, Man" (2003, 265). Religious otherness becomes nonhumanness. Afro-pessimist Frank Wilderson

takes up this theme to argue that this history and its iterations in colonialism and slavery produce an ontological division between Blacks and Humans (2010, 21, 37-38). As he puts in *Afropessimism*, "Blacks suffer the time and space subjugation of cartographic deracination and the hydraulics of the capitalist working day, we also suffer as the hosts of Human parasites" (2020, 20). In this view, (White) "Human" subjectivity relies on the ontological exclusion of Blackness. Joseph Winters calls this dynamic "a world that depends on Black suffering for its coherence" (2021). Since antiblackness and racism are so endemic, and harm so many people, it is essential for biblical studies to wrestle with this critique.

In religious studies, as you know, scholars have shown that the religion of colonized people was classified according to how legible European colonizers found their cultural practices—variously called as magic, fetishism, or maybe religion. Whether not cultural practices were called religion was typically based on how close they were to Christianity (Chidester 1996; Smith 2004). Following from these discussions, others have drawn on Wynter and Fanon to show how understandings of humanness were indexed to evaluations of religion (Maldonado-Torres 2014, An Yountae and Craig 2021).

This talk considers how people in prison—predominantly racialized people—are excluded from the category of the human, and how biblical studies may have contributed to an overall ethos that allows this to happen. I will argue that the scholarly and theological reception of the last verse in Isaiah contributes to the exclusion of those called "criminal" from conditions of the human. Isaiah 66:24, with its unquenchable fire and worm that will not die, becomes part of a network of ideas about punishment that reverberate between biblical studies, discourses of hell, and discourses about prisons. Over many centuries, the morbid dynamics of this verse have been transformed through association with the idea of Gehenna, beginning with the gospel writers who put this verse into the mouth of Jesus as he speaks about Gehenna. As is well known, the Greek term "Gehenna" is derived from Ge-Hinnom (גיא הנם), the Hebrew for valley of Hinnom, which runs south of the Jerusalem walls. Gehenna and the valley of Hinnom have long been associated with Isaiah 66:24. In the seventeenth century, the idea emerged that Hinnom was a place where people were executed and burned. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this idea was taken up in intense debates about the existence and duration of hell. These debates just so happen to pop up in North America at times when prison systems were expanding. Participants used language about criminals and prisons to make their points. It is my contention that religious and civic discourses of punishment influence each other, giving support to the idea that punishment in prison should be painful and that the people held within them can be treated as less than human.

In what follows, I will first say a few words about the original context of this verse and engage the idea that prisons are racializing and dehumanizing. I then introduce the nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates about hell and their use of Isaiah 66:24, the philological idea that criminals were burned in Hinnom, and other carceral language. Finally, I suggest other ways of reading Isaiah 66:24.

Excising the Other

The last chapter in Isaiah (66) speaks to hostilities between two groups of people in the midst of a new nation. As Ken Ristau and others have argued, Isaiah 66 seems to presuppose a time not long after the return from exile (see M. Chan 2010; Collins 2018; Ristau 2017). The final verse is typically read as promising enduring suffering for those who do not fit into the prophetic vision. The image is remarkably violent after the chapter's promise of a new nation, a new heaven, and a new earth, so much so that rabbinic practice is to repeat Isaiah 66:23 after reading 66:24 (Herbert 1975, 198).

The chapter is vague about the identities of the parties in conflict. The text is written from the perspective of the *haredim*, those trembling at God's word (החרדים אל־דברו, 6:5). Paul Hanson famously argued that the *haredim* were visionaries, a prophetic community who on return from the exile imagined the restoration of the temple differently than the Zadokite priesthood (1975, 178-86). Others have variously argued that the *haredim* were those who supported the Zadokite priesthood and its disdain of those who remained in the land (Schramm 1995, Blenkinsopp 2003, Eidevall 2009). I favor the latter view. The *haredim* oppose the ones who are called, "your brothers, those hating you, those separating from you on account of my name" (אחיכם שׂנאיכם מנדיכם למען שׁמי, 6:5). These other brothers are vilified because they are said to make themselves holy, go into gardens, eat unclean food (66:17). In the final verse, they are called rebels. They are religious others, those who do not worship YHWH in the way the text privileges. They are imagined as violently excised. As permanent food for fire and worms, they become far less than human. In my view, it is important to note that these are two groups in conflict because of the trauma of conquest, with one group violently projecting the trauma onto another. Since I have written about this in depth elsewhere (Runions 2022), here I will simply highlight that the unfavored group is related to religious otherness and rebellion—precursors to "medieval Europe's Untrue Christian Other" (Wynter 2003, 265).

In our contemporary world, people who don't fit into social and economic norms are also discarded. They often end up in prisons, where they regularly endure hellish conditions, such as extreme heat and cold, flooding, toxic environments, undrinkable water, physical and sexual abuse, forced and barely paid labor, and psychological damage in solitary confinement (Guenther 2013; Kha 2021; Levin 2023; Thompson 2019; Wang 2022). Critics have shown that racialized and marginalized people are disproportionately policed and incarcerated (Alexander 2010, Gilmore 2022). Like the U.S. prison system, the Canadian system is also racialized and inhumane. It is just smaller. Per capita, Canada's prison population is about one sixth of that of the United States (Widra 2024). Yet Canada likewise incarcerates a disproportionate number of racialized people. For instance, the Native Women's Association of Canada reports that Indigenous women make up 39% of the women's prison population (over a third), although Indigenous people are less than 4% of the population in Canada (NWAC n.d.). A Statistics Canada report states that in 2020/2021, "On an average day … there

were 42.6 Indigenous people in provincial custody per 10,000 population compared to 4.0 non-Indigenous people" (Robinson, Small, Chen, Irving 2023). Even the Canadian Department of Justice acknowledges Indigenous over representation in prison (Justice n.d.). In a 2021 *Maclean's* report, Justin Ling writes, "nearly one-third of [federal prisoners] are Indigenous, eight per cent are Black. Upwards of three-quarters of the prison population in Manitoba and Saskatchewan are Indigenous. Black and Indigenous inmates are … twice as likely to be subject to use of force, more likely to be classified for maximum security, more likely to be … put into solitary confinement, and less likely to be paroled" (2021). The report goes on to detail the poor condition of many facilities.

The damaging practice of solitary confinement is whitewashed in Canada, now called "Structured Intervention." People are held in in "Structured Intervention Units" (SIUs). A recent report by two Ryerson and University of Toronto professors looked at data provided by the Correctional Service of Canada about treatment in SIUs. They found that 28.4% of stays in SIUs went 22 hours without contact with other people; 9.9% could only go outside their cells for less than 2 hours a day. They point out that the UN Mandela rules say that confinement to a cell for 22 hours or more is a form of torture (Sprott and Doob 2021, 4, 8). The situation in the U.S. is undoubtedly worse (Solitary Watch n.d.). People in prisons are regularly treated as less than human in both countries.

Black queer religion scholar Ashon Crawley argues that this kind of "western juridical apparatus of violent control, repression, and … pre-mature death" for racialized people is a result of Enlightenment systems of thought (2017, 34). Crawley provocatively states, "To think theologically, to think philosophically, is to think racially. It is to produce thought through the epistemology of western constructions" (2017, 12). To demonstrate this point, he explores the categorical distinctions of Kantian thought alongside Kant's antiblackness. In his Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant theorizes pure reason as that which eviscerates the material and the sensory. As Crawley paraphrases, "The ordering of form 'must be found in the mind *a priori*' as an irreducible purity" (Kant 1902 [1781], 63–64; cited in Crawley 2017, 117). Crawley contests the limits that Kant puts on sensation and on embodied experience, pointing to how enslaved and formerly enslaved people were always considered materially excessive, beyond reason. He connects Kant's insistence on pure representation that is above and beyond sensation to his racism in *Observations on the Beautiful and Sublime*. Kant says that Black people "have no feeling that rises above the ridiculous" (Kant 2011 [1764], 58; cited in Crawley 2017, 120). Kant thinks they are an inferior race. In contrast, Crawley shows how the Black Pentecostal tradition resistantly challenges enlightenment thought—with its embodiment, its choreosonic rhythms, its collectivity, and its bodily excess. He calls it *atheological* and *aphilosophical* (2017, 89, 92, 108–9, 119).

The division of one kind of human from another is long standing in theological thought, especially thoughts about salvation and hell, as Crawley points out. Forty years before Kant wrote *Transcendental Aesthetics*, Jonathan Edwards preached his "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" sermon. Crawley notes that it was a response to the "New York City

Plot" in which African Americans and others rebelled and lit fires throughout the city. "Not only were the sermon's imagery and force constituted by the revolutionary insurrectionist fugitivity of enslaved blacks and poor whites in Manhattan, but the sermon was a direct reflection of a general paranoia and worry about the capacity for black radical resistance to enslavement practices, given the fact that no white person was killed during the insurrectionist episode" (Crawley 2017, 124). God's wrath becomes a kind of theological racial social control against social rebellion.

In biblical studies, Jeremy Williams also turns to the question of the human. He explores the rhetoric of criminalization as a form of racial dehumanization both now and in the ancient world. In his excellent *Criminalization in Acts of the Apostles*, Williams shows how in the Roman world those disturbing the social order and elite interests were racialized and criminalized (and vice versa, those racialized were seen as disturbing the social order). For instance, this dynamic plays out in Acts 21, when Paul is imprisoned because he is mistaken for an Egyptian who incites a rebellion (2024, 93–120). Drawing on Gay Byron's *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (2002), Williams points to the way that Egyptians were racially and criminally profiled in ancient literature (2024, 99). Acts associates Paul with the racialized Egyptian and then shows that Paul clears his name by declaring his humanness and his Roman citizenship. Ultimately then, the book of Acts buys into the Roman hierarchies of the human (2024, 103–5). Here also, racialization and criminalization are related to perceived rebellion and to the disturbance of social and religious hierarchies.

Carceral Language in Debates about Hell

With this framing in place, I turn now to the debates about the existence and duration of hell that gather steam at times when prison systems had growth spurts. In the nineteenth-century United State in the 1830s and 40s, a fierce debate raged between Universalists and Calvinists over the existence of hell. Religious newspapers, sermons, and books were filled with impassioned statements about either the cruelty or moral necessity of hell. This debate intensified not long after the first big penitentiaries were built, and as prisons were increasing from the 1820s through the 1840s. In New York the Auburn State Prison was built in 1816 and Sing Sing in 1826. The Eastern State Penitentiary was built in Philadelphia in 1829 (Rothman 1995, 114–18; Graber 2011; Manion 2015; Erzen 2017, 42–6). The Canadian prison system followed a similar pattern to the U.S. system, although in a slightly later time frame. Influenced by the design of the Auburn prison, the Kingston Penitentiary opened in 1835 (Hennessy 1999, 12, 14).

Christian doctrines of suffering and repentance were at work in the development of U.S. prisons. Religious historian Jennifer Graber (2011) has thoroughly documented the place of Protestant thinkers who worked to change the penal system so that it would reform those held within it. Quakers argued that penitence would be facilitated by solitary

confinement and reflection, while Calvinists argued for silent congregate labor and solitary rest (Rothman 1995, 117–19; Graber 2011; Erzen 2017, 42–5). As Graber shows, despite any good intentions in planning, prisons quickly became places of harsh corporeal punishment. Christian chaplains variously resisted or supported the cruelty of the wardens (then called agents). Not surprisingly then, it was not long before arguments in defense of hell began to use the language of prison, thus validating prisons as an institution. Given the relatively wide circulation of these debates about hell, especially among ministers and church members in the Northeast, these discourses fed the societal consent and administrative procedures by which criminalized communities could be severely mistreated in the nineteenth century.

In the debates between Universalists and Calvinists, one central figure was Moses Stuart. He was Professor of Sacred Literature at Andover Theological Seminary (1810–1848) and a scholar of the Hebrew Bible. Stuart was one of the first to take up a historical critical method in the U.S. and was arguably the most famous biblical scholar in North America in the early nineteenth century He trained a generation of students, ministers, and missionaries (Giltner 1988, 19–28). He also took a strong, public and cutting stand against Universalism. Universalists like Walter Balfour, whom I will come to presently, loved to debate Stuart about hell. Stuart responded with vehemence. He went so far as to say publicly that Universalists should not be allowed to hold public office, because belief in hell was essential for governance. He was rigorous in his biblical scholarship, but his theological discourse certainly went beyond the biblical.

In one 1840 essay, Stuart uses the book of Enoch, to establish what the gospel writers would have known about hell. Enoch had only been translated into English in 1821, and so it was relatively new material for scholars and the public. Stuart argues that when Jesus spoke of Gehenna he referenced an established understanding of eternal punishment. Toward the end of the essay, he strays away from Enoch, however, to make some general claims about hell. His reasoning makes civic practices of governance analogous to theological truth. He says,

> As to endless punishment, do not our State Governments immure criminals for life? May not punishment continue as long as sinning? And is it just that our civil government should exercise such a power? If you concede this point, why may it not be true, that the Supreme Governor of the Universe may immure in the State Prison of the Universe … such as cannot be permitted to go at large without jeopardizing the order, harmony, peace, and happiness of the Universe? (1840b, 23).

Hell becomes a carceral mode of keeping cosmic order, the "State Prison of the Universe." Hell, and prisons, ensure safety.

Although Stuart insisted on biblical support for theological ideas, the idea that hell protects heaven is not a biblical concept. Stuart produced a carceral safety discourse at a time when urbanization and immigration were, as ever, causing social anxiety. Religiously infused ideas about carceral safety were proffered in close proximity to the development of

biblical studies in North America—biblical "science" as Stuart calls it (1840b, 16). Notably, in an earlier essay about Enoch in that same year, Stuart uses racialized language when he discusses the punishment of fallen angels and their giant offspring. He describes the giants as "the mongrel breed of angels and women" (1840a, 95). "Mongrel breed" was a way of talking about racial mixing, including by New Divinity preachers in whose footsteps Stuart followed. For instance, Jonathan Edwards Jr. spoke against miscegenation, calling it the production of a "mongrel breed" (1791, 36, cited in Saillant 2003, 100, 212 n. 70). When Stuart uses the phrase, he subtly racializes the giants, and draws a connection between racialization, the inhuman, and painful punishment.

Jumping forward to the twentieth century, in the 1980s and 1990s, the prison industrial complex came into being. It was given an especially big boost by Bill Clinton's Crime Bill in 1994—but many of the pieces were put in place earlier with Reagan's drug war (Alexander 2010, 55–56; Dubler and Lloyd 2020, 77–92). In Canada, there was a rapid expansion in the late 1980s, first in the provincial system then in the federal system (Boe, Motiuk, and Muirhead 1998), and then again under the Harper government in the 2000s (McElligott 2017). In that same time period, evangelicals in the English-speaking global north split over hell was eternal or limited. A few noted theologians, like John Stott (British) and Clark Pinnock (Canadian), tentatively considered eventual annihilation, to the consternation of more conservative traditionalists. There was an explosion of books and articles refuting annihilationism, with sensational titles like, *Hell on Trial* (Peterson 1995), or *The Road to Hell* (Pawson, 2014 [1988]). At Regent College, J. I. Packer (a British born Canadian citizen) strongly defended traditional hell. He would not have been likely to produce sensationalist books, but he did reference them (1997, 39). As in the nineteenth century, carceral language makes an appearance. For instance, Packer talks about hell's *inmates*, "Hell, according to the Gospel, is … moral retribution, and discussions of … length for its inmates must proceed within that frame" (1997, 42). David Pawson characterizes the two views of hell under consideration as "incarceration or incineration." He argues against incineration and instead insists on hell as "continued existence in ruined condition" (2014 [1988], 149). In other words, incarceration in ruined condition. This powerful image has become increasingly accurate.

On the other side, Pinnock and Stott queried whether eternal hell was perhaps disproportional to sin; annihilation could allow length of punishment to be proportional to sin (Edwards and Stott, 1988, 318-9; Walvoord et al. 1996, 152–3). At about this time the U.S. Supreme Court was debating proportionality in sentencing over a series of cases. Justice Antonin Scalia, who publicly stated that he believed in hell (2013, 2017), ultimately set precedent *against* proportional punishment in *Harmelin v. Michigan* (1991). The Court allowed states to create mandatory life without parole sentences, even for first time offenses. Longer sentences contributed to the growth of the prison industrial complex. Once again, prisons mirrored the dominant view of hell.

Burning Criminals in Gehenna

Within both nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates about hell, Isaiah 66:24 contributes to dehumanizing carceral language. Stated frequently in these discussions is the fact that Gehenna is the Greek term for the valley of Hinnom. Hinnom is connected to Isaiah 66:24 via the gospel of Mark, where Jesus says that if your hand sins it is better to cut it off and "enter life maimed ... than go to Gehenna ... where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43–48). In reaching for historical referents for Gehenna, exegetes have taken up the idea that Hinnom was a place for burning garbage (Fudge 1982, 162; Walvoord, Crockett, Hayes, Pinnock 1996, 20, 58, 146; Block 2004, 61; Pawson 2014 [1988], 51). This interpretation comes from Rabbi Kimhi in the twelfth century, a fact that was recognized by some (Bailey 1986). Yet this picture of Gehenna was consistently given as historical fact. This language of detritus and discard repeats and amplifies the disposal of the rebellious in Isaiah 66.

When Isaiah 66:24 gets incorporated into discussions of Hinnom, its otherizing dynamics are repeated on a whole new level. In one disturbing trend, some interpreters further imagine Hinnom as a place for the bodies of criminals. In the twentieth-century hell debates, traditionalist John Walvoord asserts, "The valley was used as a burial place for criminals and for burning garbage" (1996, 20). Criminals become garbage whose bodies are unceremoniously burned. Walvoord mirrors almost exactly, without citing, a 1980 edition of the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Davies 1980, 671). The same claim is made in other sources, including in the *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (2001), which says, without providing archaeological evidence, "To prevent infection—rubbish, bodies of criminals, and animals were dumped in the valley and eventually burnt" (Negev and Gibson 2001, 230). To the contrary, evidence of human remains and burial sites in the valleys around Jerusalem shows interment with respect (Ben-Dov 1994; Greenhut 1994, Smoak 2019).

How did the idea that criminals were burned in Hinnom emerge? Hinnom *is* biblically associated with *tophet*, which in turn is said to be used for Molech worship, where children were "passed through the fire" (2 Kgs 16:3, 21:6, 23:10, Jer 7:31–32, 32:35; 2 Chr 23:3, 33:6). But beyond the ambiguities of "passed through the fire," or the question of whether human sacrifice ever took place at *tophet* (Gilmour 2019; Dewrell 2015; Stavrakopoulou 2004), it takes quite a few interpretive steps to get to burning criminals like garbage.

To understand where this gruesome idea came from, I traced back citations in philological texts and commentaries. In the fourth century, Jerome described Hinnom as a beautiful valley which was defiled by Molech worship (Aquinas 1874, 300). By the ninth century, the story of Josiah desecrating Tophet (2 Kgs 23:10) was combined with the story of Josiah burning the bones of the heterodox at Bethel and Samaria (2 Kgs 23:15–20). Rabanus Maurus, preserved by Aquinas, wrote that Gehenna was "a name thought to be derived from a valley consecrated to idols near Jerusalem, and filled of old with dead bodies,

and defiled by Josiah" (Aquinas 1874, 178). Then in twelfth century, in his commentary on Psalm 27:13, Kimhi added the detail that the valley was "a disgusting place, and all the impurities and carcasses were dumped there, and there was a constant fire there to burn the impurities and the bones of the carcasses" (Kimhi 1856, translation, Sefaria).

In the seventeenth century the idea fully emerges. John Lightfoot, Cambridge Hebraist and member of the Westminster Assembly, contributed the unfortunate idea that that Jews burned people alive in Hinnom. He drew his authority from the Mishnah, tractate Sanhedrin (7:2), which describes—a very likely hypothetical—execution by burning. The rabbis do not refer to Hinnom as the place for the type of execution they describe, but Lightfoot connects it through Kimhi (1655, 6). As scholars have pointed out, it is difficult to discern whether Jewish authorities had the power to conduct executions under Rome, but if it did happen, it was not likely a common occurrence (Steinmetz 2004, 82–83; Berkowitz 2006, 3–24; Lorberbaum 2015, 107–14). Moreover, the method of burning is quite impractical and involves burying a person and throwing a lit wick into a person's mouth. This unlikely practice suggests that the rabbis were making metaphorical points rather than defining practice. Berkowitz argues that apart from any literal meaning, the descriptions serve to increase the Rabbis' religious authority (2006, 5–7, 18–19, 78). Nonetheless in providing background for Gehenna, Lightfoot amplifies this rabbinic image. He combines Isaiah 66:24 with Kimhi's description of Hinnom, and with Matthew 5:22, where Jesus references both "the Sanhedrin" and "the Gehenna of fire" as possible sites of sanction for the person who insults another or calls them a fool. The reference to the Sanhedrin points Lightfoot toward Jewish law and the Mishnah. Glossing Matt 5:22, he states, "And besides the reference to the valley of Hinnom, he [Jesus] seemeth to refer to that penalty used by the Sanhedrin, of burning: the most bitter death that they used to put men unto" (1655, 7–8). He then gives a very graphic description, which goes far beyond what the Mishnah says to include pouring molten lead down the throat of the sentenced person.

The idea that Hinnom was a place for burning people alive took further hold in the eighteenth century. By the early eighteenth century, Philip Doddridge translated Matt 5:22 as if burning people alive in Hinnom was part of scripture:

> But whosoever, in his unreasonable Passion, shall presume to say unto his Brother, Thou Fool…shall be obnoxious to the Fire of Hell, or to a future Punishment more dreadful, even than that of *being burnt alive in the Valley of Hinnom*, from whence you borrow the Name of those Infernal Regions. (1756 [1739], 243–44, italics mine)

John Parkhurst takes up this suggestion from Doddridge in his Greek lexicon, in the entry on Gehenna (1769). Parkhurst became a central exegetical tool in the nineteenth century. By this point, philological speculation had become fact. Thus, Hinnom as a living crematory for criminals comes as an established idea that passes into debates about hell, just at the time that prisons were being established as the predominant form of punishment.

In the nineteenth-century debates about hell, Universalist Walter Balfour drew

heavily on lexicons and Bible dictionaries by Parkhurst, Adam Clarke, and Augustine Calmet, all of whom gave versions of this image. Balfour made it his life's work to contest Moses Stuart. In one book length refutation of Stuart, Balfour mentions the "fact" of burning criminals alive in Hinnom. He quotes Parkhurst: "Matth v. 22 does, I apprehend, in its *outward* and *primary* sense, relate to that dreadful doom of being *burnt alive in the valley of Hinnom"* (Parkhurst 1769, 108, italics original; Balfour 1824, 149). Balfour wants to establish the "outward sense" as the "primary sense" for Gehenna (152). In his view, burning in Gehenna signified war and "temporal punishment coming on the Jewish nation" (1824, 152). He clarified in another document that he did not think that Jews truly burned criminals alive as a juridical matter (1831, 221).

Stuart's equally lengthy response to Balfour takes up this point but uses it to suggest that Jesus's reference to Gehenna indicates the "internal sense" of God's punishment in hell. He says,

> It is of some importance to this investigation, to inquire whether the Jews were ever accustomed to execute malefactors by burning them. That such a mode of punishment was once practiced, and in certain cases even enjoined by the Mosaic law, is certain. … But that the Jews were accustomed to execute criminals in this way, in our Saviour's time, there is no certain proof. The allusion, however, in Matt. 5:22, seems almost necessarily to imply that such was the fact. (1830, 141)

For a person with strong opinions, Stuart uncharacteristically waffles here between knowing and not knowing whether this was a practice. He ultimately reads Jesus's (interpretively imagined) reference to the juridical practice as metaphorical, but his historical reasoning—based on philological tools—deduced that actual juridical violence could have taken place.

This exchange between Stuart and Balfour circulated among and between their respective circles, thus repeating and giving credence to these ideas. Even highly regarded Universalist, Hosea Ballou, later boiled the meaning of Gehenna down to say that it was "nothing but that place of execution, where malefactors were cast alive, and consumed in fire" (1834, 114). By 1840, a Universalist catechism on the gospel of Matthew queries, "Q. What is meant by *hell fire*? A. Probably the fire in which criminals were burnt in the valley of Hinnom" (Sadler 1840, 30). While Universalist and Calvinist reasons for making this claim were vastly different, based on whether they thought the fire burned in this world or the next, no one questioned the philology and its implications for people accused of crime.

These discourses subtly or not so subtly reinforce the idea that punishment for crime should be hellish. It is little wonder then that in the early 1830s Isaiah 66:24 comes into a prison memoire. John Reynolds recounts his nine years in Vermont's Windsor prison, saying "The prison at Windsor is one of those gloomy and dreadful places, which image to the mind that house of woe and pain, where are weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched; and into which the wicked will be turned, and all the nations that forget God" (1839 [1834], 38; also citing Ps. 9:17, and Matt. 8:12).

Reynolds describes Windsor as a place where people endured tortures such as the lash, solitary punishment in freezing temperatures, ankles chained with wooden blocks of thirty to sixty pounds, and the iron jacket (36–37). Even within the first twenty years of its existence, Windsor prison manifested hellish disregard for the incarcerated.

By the time we get to the twentieth-century debates about hell, the idea of burning criminals *alive* in Hinnom had gone out of fashion. Still the idea of criminal bodies being burned like garbage was present, as we saw. Some amplified the connection to criminality. Pawson says, "In Jesus's day [Gehenna] also had criminal associations. The corpses were the bodies of crucified felons 'thrown into' Gehenna" (2014 [1988], 51–52).

With this kind of religious discourse circulating, it is unsurprising that criminalized people were treated with such disdain in the buildup of the prison industrial complex. The rhetoric and work of John DiIulio provides a prime example. He was the Princeton political scientist and pundit who infamously coined the term "superpredator" to describe Black youth. In 1996, the same year that Walvoord repeated the tradition about criminals and garbage being burned in Hinnom, DiIulio reiterated something he had heard from a judge, that urban Black youth were a "*horde from hell*" (1996, 23). At the Senate Subcommittee on Youth Violence, DiIulio further spoke of these youths' "moral poverty." He said it came from "growing up surrounded by deviant, delinquent, and criminal adults in chaotic, dysfunctional, fatherless, Godless, and jobless settings" (1996, 24). His heteropatriarchal assessment of the deviance of Black culture mentions economic factors but focuses on individualized and family causes of social harm. He does not acknowledge the racial capitalism—to use Cedric Robinson's term, applied to the carceral context by Ruth Wilson Gilmore—that *requires* the racialized inequality of what DiIulio calls "jobless settings" (Robinson 1983, 1–24; Gilmore 2022, 303–8, 472–73).

As I have shown, discourses about prison and hell directly and indirectly influence each other. Biblical scholarship has produced and reproduced philological speculation as fact, in ways that contribute to aligning criminals with garbage to be burnt, alive or dead, in the prison of Gehenna. The "science" of interpreting the Bible, as Stuart saw his work, has contributed to the kinds of discourses that imagine prisons as places where people can be treated as less than human.

By Way of a Conclusion: Reading Worms and Fire Otherwise

So how can we repair this harm? I would like to think past the category of the human for a moment and read Isaiah 66:24 through the lens of the nonhuman, to rethink where the threat lies. In other words, I would like to revalue the nonhuman figures of worms and fire, in order to diminish their threat. Instead of consigning the nonhuman or rebellious religious or racial other to the fire as punishment, we can think of this image as signifying differently. First the worms. As queer theorist Mel Chen (2012) has pointed out in their book *Animacies*, racialized divisions between humans are also connected to the divide between humans and animals.

Chen demonstrates that as people are racialized they are considered animate, associated with animals (89–126). This kind of stereotyping is another way that people are excluded from the realm of the human and become easier to harm in prison. One way to disrupt such hierarchies is to challenge the divide between humans and animals. Our CSBS/SCÉB colleagues Sébastien Doane (2024) and Anne Létourneau (2024) have troubled the idea of the human by turning to animal studies. They show how humans and animals and land are all shaped by each other—points acknowledged in biblical texts but overlooked by readers. Indeed, humans are interdependent with animals.

Along these lines, we should thank the worms for eternally eating corpses, without them the earth would be a toxic hazard. While perhaps not pleasant to "look out on," they perform a vital service, as Jennifer Koosed points out in her meditation on the worm and other animals in wisdom literature (2022, 272–73). Of course, the worms that eat corpses are likely various kinds of larvae; nonetheless, they are cleaning up. Perhaps the warning of Isaiah 66:24 is that at the end of the day we will all be food for organisms that we consider insignificant. The worms and larvae are ascendant, not the people looking on. The divisions and foreclosures to "righteousness"—such as evidenced in the split between brothers in Isaiah 66—are ultimately meaningless. Why invent a story of eternal punishment and reward to give our human divides meaning? Moreover, worms create space for life. In her essay on Job and maggots, Suzanna Millar writes, "Small life is fundamental to the eco-entanglements which perpetually destroy and create possibilities for all life" (2024). The rebels and the worms are co-constitutive of new potential.

And then there is the fire. What if we thought of the unquenchable fire as the beyond-hope of rebellion? Those consigned to the fire in Isaiah 66:24 are religious others, considered rebellious. They are dehumanized in the same way as racialized and criminalized others. And yet we know that what is called rebellion is often either social difference or acts of survival. I call the fire the beyond-hope because hope is often held out as a carrot to encourage docility—that is certainly how it works within prisons, where people can do all the work of rehabilitation and still be denied parole. Hope operates on the register of the human—it is not truly available for those foreclosed from it. Instead, rebels practice what prison abolitionist Dylan Rodríguez calls "sustained acts of insurgent, collective creativity," working to be "unapologetically *free* from the systems, epistemologies, and institutionalities of gendered anti-Black and racial-colonial dehumanization" (2021, 57). The unquenchable fire could be read as radical insurgency. This is a space in which some of us cannot easily partake because we are so ensconced and invested in White epistemologies, economics, racializations, and institutions of the human.

J. Kameron Carter describes Black disruption of the human another way in his meditation on the representation of Blackness in Aime Cesaire's poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*). In Carter's reading, Cesaire sees Blackness as that which is violently consumed, digested, and excreted by racial capitalism but also operates as a block to its digestive system. Carter calls Blackness a "dissent into hell."

It is a disruption. Thus "its action occurs in a liminal zone that is nothing less than the break/down of the world of the (hu)Man" (2021, 183). The space of the "nonhuman" operates outside of, in between, and against the structures that do such harm. It moves toward a complete remaking. One could read Blackness, or other religiously and racially excluded people, as the unquenchable fire.

I have traveled some distance from my opening gambit that we need to support the humanities through critique. In fact, that suggestion is inadequate. The humanities are often invested in the same epistemological, economic, racial, and institutional structures that foreclose some people from the human. Certainly, it seems that biblical studies has been so invested, as we have seen. Yet as Richard Middleton (2021) and Christine Mitchell (2018) pointed out in their CSBS/SCÉB presidential addresses, there are modes of biblical studies that move in other directions—perspectival and decolonial—some produced by our members (just to name a few, Anderson and Aldred 2022, Black 2020; X. Chan 2021; Kotrosits 2024; Sabo 2022; Schellenberg 2021, Zeichmann 2022). Ashon Crawley and J. Kameron Carter have suggested that *atheological* and *aphilosophical* thought systems that emerge from excluded collectivities are required to counter the exclusions of a racist order. This does not mean extracting knowledge and frameworks in a colonial manner, as Maia Kotrosits points out scholars sometimes do (2024, 4). No, our only way forward, as hard as it might be, is to make room for the unquenchable rebellious fire—in our scholarship, in our discipline, in the humanities, in seminaries, in the neoliberal University, and in our conceptions of justice.

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Batten	Alicia	Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo
Beaulieu	Stephane	Burman University
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Bell	Ron	McMaster Divinity College
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Beverly	Larry W.	Presbyterian Church of Canada
Black	Fiona C.	Mt. Allison University
Blumell	Lincoln H.	Brigham Young University
Boda	Mark	McMaster Divinity College
Braun	Willi	University of Alberta
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Calnitsky	Ed	University of Winnipeg
Campbell	Jonathan	Burman University
Carboni	Matteo	University of St. Michael's College
Chan	Xenia	Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto
Chester	Stephen	Wycliffe College
Cho	Yohan	McMaster University
Choi	Chun Yi	McMaster Divinity College
Clarke	Russell D.	Tyndale University
Cousland	Robert	UBC Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies
Cox	Claude	McMaster Divinity College
Crook	Zeba	Carleton University
Darsigny-Trépanier	Laurence	Université du Québec à Montréal
Denzey Lewis	Nicola	Claremont Graduate University
DeRoche	Michael	Memorial University of Newfoundland
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Doane	Sebastien	Universite Laval
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