Assembling a group of essays in honor of a colleague is always an untidy process. Even when the essays fall within a relatively similar purview of interest, such a project necessarily involves a broad range of expertise. The same sort of collection becomes untidier still when the subject of honor is himself accomplished in a broad array of subjects. This is the proud plight of the present volume.

We are happy to dedicate this volume in honor of David Lyle Jeffrey on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. This expression of appreciation from his former students, former and present colleagues, and fellow scholars is only fitting for one who has been a mentor to so many, academically and personally. Since 1968 Professor Jeffrey has shared his love of learning and his expertise through his lectures and publications. These include literally hundreds of papers and essays, as well as his teaching at many institutions of higher learning: University of Victoria (Canada), University of Rochester (NY), University of Ottawa (Canada), Augustine College (Canada). He now serves as Distinguished Professor of Literature and Humanities in the Honors College at Baylor University. Jeffrey has been a visiting professor at Peking University (Beijing), University of International Business and Economics (Beijing), University of Notre Dame, Regent College (Canada), and University of Hull (UK), and he is currently Professor Emeritus of English Literature at the University of Ottawa, Guest Professor
at Peking University, and Honorary Professor of the University of Business and Economics (Beijing).

Our volume assembles material from a seeming kaleidoscope of topics. When we first embarked on this project two years ago, we had a general notion that the contributions solicited would lie along a broad spectrum. In the course of reading and editing the essays, however, the full extent of Jeffrey’s interests and professional contributions became apparent: medieval literature and thought (including history of the English language); medieval Latin, Italian, French, and Middle English literature, medieval-Renaissance art history; the Bible as literature; modern Judaism and the Hebrew Bible; contemporary English literature; eighteenth-century British literature; late medieval humanism; contemporary literary theory; and the growth of Christianity in China. Several of these topics appear in the present collection, although the volume as a whole is informed by the contention that the rich tradition of liberal learning in the West is no less biblical than classical and will therefore be truly understood only in light of its biblical character. On this basis Jeffrey produced, over the course of sixteen years, a great undertaking titled, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (1993). The intrinsic merit of this work was recognized by fellow scholars, aptly demonstrated in its being named the Choice Outstanding Academic Book (1993) and *Christianity Today* Reference Book of the Year (1993) and receiving the Conference on Christianity and Literature Book of the Year Award (1993).

While the work of other scholars may be no less voluminous or insightful in a manner comparable to Jeffrey’s, the latter’s work is distinguished by the integrated character of his extraordinarily wide erudition. Jeffrey earned his Ph.D. at Princeton University in 1968, just three years after finishing his B.A. at Wheaton College. He was elected to the International Association of University Professors of English in 1989, and he was appointed a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, Academy of Arts and Sciences, in 1996. Jeffrey delights in praying aloud in Hebrew; and he speaks French, German, and Italian and has a reading knowledge of Latin, Old and Middle English, Anglo-Norman, old French, and biblical Hebrew. He has raised Hereford cattle and quarterhorses and is an accomplished horseman; he has renovated and restored several Victorian-era homes and loves to garden; he has published both poetry and short fiction; he can converse

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intelligently with mathematicians; he lectures and writes about the whole gamut of medieval literature, modern English literature (Canadian, British, and American), biblical exegesis, ancient and modern Judaism, patristic and medieval theology, Latin paleography and manuscript interpretation, early English lyric, Chaucer, Wyclif, and English spirituality, the Franciscans, John Wesley, and art and iconography in the West. Inspiring and cultivating high-caliber Christian scholarship in China has also been an important part of Jeffrey’s work for nearly twenty years, having made numerous presentations throughout China on Western literature and the Bible, as well as on Marxism and Confucianism. In this sense, Jeffrey might well be described, without exaggeration, as a polymath (polymathés), also known as a “polyhistor,” which means “one who has learned much.” If a generalist is someone who knows something about many areas, a polymath is one who knows a great deal about a large number of subjects spanning the arts and sciences. Of course, there are no official criteria or standards by which one is deemed a polymath, and the category is difficult to apply without sounding overly encomiastic. But one senses a polymathic mind when working closely with such a person; you are invariably drawn into that person’s orbit around whom projects of very different kinds are concurrently moving and being shaped. You realize your participation in one of these projects is just that: you are barely holding onto the way in which your own area of expertise is thrust into an integrative sphere that contains several dimensions, some of which you never considered.

Among the appended list of Jeffrey’s publications one will find that he has and shares a love for Christ and his Kingdom—as the Wheaton College motto goes. This has taken the form of writing for Catholic and Protestant journals, as well as more broadly ecumenical ones. Accordingly, he has lectured in Israel and published in Jewish periodicals and essay collections. The bottom line in all this is love for the scriptures and for the people who love them. Any attempt to sketch Jeffrey’s work would not be complete were it to omit his expressed goal of fidelity, in word and deed, as a disciple of Christ. To spend any appreciable time in his company is to discover that there is nothing of the coy Christian demeanor that shapes the type of personality that characterizes many learned men. Jeffrey makes plain his Christian commitment, which has been the driving force of much his scholarship and of his engagement with China. But what strikes many
of those who have participated with him in a project or a conference is that he wears his learning lightly. He does not assume that his opinions carry a special authority but draws others into a shared quest for wisdom. He participates in discussions with others vigorously—whether peers or undergraduates—but not to intimidate or overwhelm. The central importance of practicing the virtues in the Christian life is apparent in how Jeffrey has tempered his work, whether as a teacher, a scholar, or an administrator.

Nothing about this volume is meant to indicate that Jeffrey has reached the twilight of his career, since nothing could be further from the truth. Anyone who has worked with him will know of his boundless energy. At present, he is writing a new book about the theology in Western painting and an essay on Marc Chagall and the surprising Jewish interest in Jesus in the mid-twentieth century and directing Baylor’s participation in the translation and interpretation of manuscripts from the Green Collection—to name a few ventures that we know about. Rather, our hope for this collection is that it will be a timely expression of our shared appreciation for Jeffrey as a teacher, as a colleague, as a churchman, and, especially, as a friend. Ad Multos Annos!

The title of this collection, *Transformations in Biblical Literary Traditions: Incarnation, Narrative, and Ethics*, identifies some of the central cross-disciplinary concerns that run throughout Jeffrey’s work. All of the essays are concerned, in a variety of ways, with ongoing historical changes in the interpretive reception of biblical texts. Some of the essays are more strictly historical, emphasizing the “transformations” noted in the title, while others are more concerned with the literary or imaginative aspects of biblical reception at a given point in history. Still other essays are oriented toward the more directly ethical connections between biblical texts and literary interpretation. Despite the variety of disciplines that these essays represent, each engages some aspect of Jeffrey’s exemplary study of the historical interactions between biblical reception, verbal art, and ethical action.

In keeping with the character of Jeffrey’s work, the scope and aims of this collection extend beyond the customary purview of scholars con-
cerned with the discourse known as “religion and literature.” One of the recurring themes in Jeffrey’s work is the claim that biblical narratives, metaphors, and modes of inquiry (“reading”) continue to shape a wide variety of disparate intellectual traditions, including (and especially) the work of those scholars who disavow the explicit truth claims of biblical religion. As Jeffrey has shown, profound engagement with and indebtedness to biblical texts and their study is apparent not only in medieval and renaissance writers but also among the most characteristically modern and postmodern writers. For example, “the idea of literary criticism as cultural criticism, now commonplace [since Marx], gets much of its early momentum from Augustine’s method” of reading the Bible in relation to other texts.¹ Nor is the ongoing character of literary criticism’s indebtedness to biblical hermeneutics limited to the likes of Matthew Arnold and his mirror image rejection of that Augustinian tradition.² Rather, the engagement with biblical texts (whether interpretively or in reaction) turns out to be formative for many major Enlightenment writers. As Jeffrey points out, whether we consider Isaac Newton’s fascination with biblical prophecy or the political arguments of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, or Baruch Spinoza, an engagement with scripture is central to the development of their intellectual projects.³ In a similar manner, the arguments of a wide variety of postmodern critical theorists remain dependent, even in a mode of necessary rejection, upon traditions of biblical textual interpretation.⁴

Such a condition of ironic reversal is not limited, however, to the ongoing tacit dependence of secular and postsecular discourse upon biblical narratives, metaphors, and modes of reading. Jeffrey’s scholarship also illuminates the ways in which explicit appeals to scripture have resulted, unwittingly or not, in undermining the authority of that very text.⁵ Most important, he has shown that the tendency to reduce faith to a “feeling” and to reduce scripture to an antiquarian “relic of culture” are two sides of a single dynamic that disables the genuinely receptive reading of any text, including scripture.⁶ In this sense, to narrate the transformations in biblical literary traditions is to illuminate both the obscured role of the Bible in Western culture and the obscured role of literary imagination in reading the Bible.

Rather than summarize the ensuing essays, our aim here is to draw attention to the implicit points of intersection between their respective

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arguments, suggesting the mutual illumination that this volume uniquely offers. Throughout his scholarship but especially in *People of the Book*, Jeffrey has drawn attention to the ways in which imaginative engagements with biblical texts have been central to larger shifts in Christian and post-Christian hermeneutics, ethics, and aesthetics. In recent decades, literary studies have arguably taken what may be called a “turn to religion.” This volume challenges and deepens that growing discourse by showing how imaginative literature, across varied traditions, unfolds a central interaction between the understandings of biblical literature, imaginative narrative, and moral judgment. The essays in this volume form two groups: the first set of essays focuses on specific episodes or moments of historical change within the European biblical literary traditions; the second set focuses on the dissemination of biblical literary engagements in the places that lie beyond European contexts, ranging from North America to South Africa to China.

The essays that make up part 1 of the volume are all concerned, in a variety of ways, with the changing character of the intersections between biblical interpretation and imaginative literature in European contexts. The first three essays consider key pre-Enlightenment moments of change in the configuration of the relation between the interpretive “grammar” (broadly understood) of biblical texts, the grammar of nonbiblical texts, and the grammar of the cosmic order. Phillip Donnelly’s essay focuses on a pivotal shift in the teaching of Latin grammar in England, an ethically motivated shift that ultimately helped to shape the context for the English biblical epics. The second essay, by Dennis Danielson, considers how the most notable of such biblical epics, *Paradise Lost*, in the very midst of the Copernican revolution, continues to suggest the semiotic character of the cosmos. The third essay, by Sarah-Jane Murray and Tyler Walton, focuses on the important medieval French text, the *Ovide moralisé* (Moralized Ovid). This text arguably represents a full flowering, in a Franciscan mode, of the Augustinian confidence that Christians can grow in wisdom through engaging not only the book of scripture and the book of the cosmos but also the imaginative and philosophical literature of pagan antiquity. The key point to appreciate is that each of these first three essays provides a glimpse of a specific episode in the history of biblical “reading,” in the full sense. Each moment includes an ethically and theologically rooted reconfigura-
tion of the relation between the book of scripture, the book of nature, and imaginative literature generally. Each episode can also be understood as a different “branch” on the historical “tree” that grew from the seeds of Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*, which maintains that all truth is God’s truth and that the entirety of human and nonhuman creation is semiotic in character, for those who know how to read.7

The remaining four essays in part 1 attend specifically to ways in which biblical interpretation and imaginative writing intersect in a series of responses to what would come to be known as the Enlightenment. The essays by Stephen Prickett and John Fleming also unfold the new understandings of “history” that arise through that intersection. Prickett shows how the very idea of “literature,” as a privileged, “value-laden” category, arises from a union of aesthetic, political, and theological imperatives. The argument reveals how the Romantic notion of “symbol” involves a variation on the theological understanding of the Incarnation but also how Romantic aesthetic theory, in effect, reinterprets the entire history of the Western intellectual tradition, including the Bible, as “literature” in this newly privileged sense. Fleming’s argument similarly engages early responses—both imaginatively and theologically interested—to Enlightenment philosophical claims. Taking points of departure from Augustinian and Franciscan understandings of the relation between faith and reason, Fleming shows how Hume’s argument against the possibility of miracles (and by implication the Resurrection) posed a challenge not only for Christian faith, but for all manner of historical knowledge in principle. This latter connection provides the opportunity for composing the imaginative satirical treatment of the question, “Did Napoleon Exist?” Ultimately, Fleming reveals how shifts in biblical hermeneutics impinged on the composition of imaginative literature. Ralph Wood’s essay on G. K. Chesterton also traces some contrasting theological and imaginative responses to the intellectual challenges posed by modernity. Wood argues that the often whimsical imaginative work of Chesterton was ultimately shaped by a type of “ecclesial humanism” that anticipates some of the key elements of what would come to be called *la nouvelle théologie*. In contrast to the “integral humanism” of someone like Jacques Maritain, which attempted to infuse an entire culture with “implicitly Christian values,” Chesterton sought to renew the created order through the “obedient and grateful joy” of the church.
Part 1 culminates in Dominic Manganiello’s essay on the fiction of Charles Williams and J. R. R. Tolkien. Manganiello’s argument foregrounds the ethical dimension of the narrative art used by these two novelists, specifically as they contrast a uniquely biblical understanding of friendship with the view of friendship offered by both classical and postmodern ethics. Each of these four essays describes a unique imaginative attempt to address the intellectual and moral challenges posed by the Enlightenment; in each case, the imaginative enterprise develops in a manner that makes it inseparable from engagement with biblical literature.

Part 2 shifts our attention to the unfolding of biblical literary traditions beyond European contexts. In considering the first three of these essays, we should first note the extent to which the North American context, despite much direct cultural inheritance, must be understood as a decidedly non-European context. The crucial point to appreciate here is that from very early on the Canadian and American engagement of biblical literature occurred largely without the benefit of established cultural traditions that predate the Enlightenment and which could provide any obstacle to the unfolding of a merely technological civilization. In this respect, the dynamics of biblical interpretation and appropriation must be understood as the unfolding of one of the few pre-Enlightenment cultural resources available in the dominant cultures of North America. The difficulty, of course, is that by the eighteenth century the European inheritance received by North Americans already tended toward the imprisoning of biblical interpretation within the problematics of modern instrumental rationality. This tendency for Enlightenment assumptions to shape biblical interpretation is demonstrated not only in the essays by Prickett and Fleming in this volume but also in the historical example of the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye, who remains for many the exemplary critic for “reading the Bible as literature.” This state of affairs reveals the importance of Gregory Maillet’s essay, which begins part 2. Maillet’s argument shows why the work of David Jeffrey, on both the imaginative dimensions of biblical literature and the history of imaginative responses to the Bible, will ultimately prove more enduring and more important than the work of his fellow Canadian, Northrop Frye. At one level, Jeffrey’s scholarship reveals a commitment to understand those aesthetic aspects of biblical literature that appear only for those who are willing to study the original languages; at a deeper level, however, his work also reveals the necessary ways that an
interpreter’s relation to biblical authority will shape the interpretive results. Mark Noll’s essay continues this volume’s unfolding attention to biblical interpretation by comparing some of the political and confessional uses to which biblical writings were put in Canada with those in the United States. Noll contends that the biblical heritage shared in common by these two countries included, in the nineteenth century, the overt political appropriation of scripture, no less in Canada than in the United States. Ultimately, both Maillet’s and Noll’s essays reveal some of the political, imaginative, and theological consequences resulting from the shifts in biblical hermeneutics and literary imagination that Prickett and Fleming describe.

The differences between Noll’s essay and the ensuing essay by Eleonore Stump are a striking example of the variety of investigative trajectories encouraged by Jeffrey’s scholarship on biblical literature. Noll’s work is an excellent example of historical exposition; Stump’s is an excellent example of philosophical inquiry. Both are concerned with the imaginative engagement of the Bible, but Noll describes historical examples of such use for political and confessional purposes, while Stump pursues a set of philosophical questions. What makes Stump’s essay unique in this volume is the fact that she is actively doing philosophy—pursuing, in this case, ethical wisdom regarding the character of suffering—by drawing upon the resources of biblical narrative and its subsequent literary interpretation. In this sense, her essay exemplifies a specific kind of North American philosophical attempt to participate actively in a biblical literary tradition rather than describe it. Stump’s approach to the biblical story of Samson suggests that the artistic subtleties of such biblical narrative are not properly separable from its richness as a resource for philosophical inquiry into the problem of suffering.

The remaining three essays in the volume offer more than a conclusion or even a culmination. Rather, they gesture toward the future of studies that unite biblical and literary inquiry by revealing some of the ways that biblical literary traditions might appear in the context of global Christianity. As such, these essays suggest potential for further interactions between biblical and literary studies. Theresa Coletti explores how a South African theater company adapted medieval biblical dramatic texts from the “Chester cycle” mystery plays. The argument foregrounds the connections between aesthetic form (in this case, drama), biblical narrative, moral vision, and the very possibility of perceiving Divine Incarnation. At the same
time, Coletti’s argument presents an example of how a cross-cultural engagement with biblical narrative results in profound changes to both the biblical material and the culture that undertakes such engagement.

The final two essays are by distinguished Chinese scholars with whom David Jeffrey has worked closely. The contribution by Yang Huilin, like Coletti’s, focuses on an episode of cross-cultural exchange involving biblical literature. Yang considers the historical example of James Legge, a nineteenth-century translator of Chinese classical literature who explored the opportunities for mutual illumination offered by the interaction between biblical literature and the Chinese texts that he translated. Beyond the recounting of a past exchange, however, the essay also importantly suggests the need for further interdisciplinary study in such a mode. The final essay, by Liu Yi-Qing, is especially fitting to close the volume, as it is the most personal in character, giving a direct description of Jeffrey’s work in China and the reception of his scholarship, most notably the Dictionary of Biblical Tradition and People of the Book (now both translated into Chinese). Liu offers an almost panegyric description of Jeffrey’s personal involvement with Chinese scholars, both in China and in North America. Ultimately, he suggests that both the scholarship and the personal involvement of Jeffrey has been crucial in helping to encourage and enable the cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary engagement between biblical and literary studies in China. As the number of scholars in China studying biblical literary traditions continues to grow, the work of David Jeffrey will arguably become more deeply and broadly influential.

Beyond the geographic and chronological groupings into which the essays fall, the deeper connections between them suggest that the imaginative engagement with biblical literature and the study of that engagement has consistently been drawn into questions of “reading” and its role in ethical formation—how people learn to read biblical and nonbiblical texts but also how people read their own lives and the world that they inhabit. By consistently drawing others toward a understanding of these matters, in his scholarship but also in his generosity to so many students and colleagues, the work of David Jeffrey models what Benedict XIV calls the “apostolate of ‘intellectual charity.’”

DHW
PJD

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Notes

2. Ibid., 603–5, 615–18.
5. Ibid., 317–52.