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Editor's Introduction

As long as religion plays a crucial role in shaping our global human history, as it certainly does in the year 2012, it cannot be ignored because it is difficult to fully understand or because it is tough to predict. At the same time, religion is not the only shaper of history and must not be treated as the sole, isolated force that carves our collective future. While finding a balance between addressing religion as indispensable to culture and regarding it as one complex piece in a larger puzzle may be difficult, if not impossible, it is essential that we try. It is with this goal in mind that the writers for this journal sit down before their worn plastic keys to offer up unique perspectives on how we can engage with the ever evolving, impossible to fully grasp, human phenomenon that is religion.

For this second issue of the Claremont Journal of Religion, we decided to work in conjunction with Claremont Lincoln University's national student conference, "A More Perfect Union: Religious Assessments of the American Experiment," in order to gather papers that seek this balanced approach to engaging with religion. Centered on the pursuit of a more perfect society, an activity highlighted in the Preamble to the United States Constitution, this conference allowed various voices to discuss ways in which our less than perfect American Union has evolved throughout history and how we can continue to cultivate a better future. While religion served as the undercurrent for this academic endeavor, science, politics, and education were some of the core topics discussed, for these subjects greatly influence larger social issues.

In addition to our excitement over publishing papers from this conference, we are also enthused to kick off this issue with an enthralling interview with Frank Schaeffer—author, filmmaker, and public speaker. CJR creator Kile Jones picks Schaeffer’s brain in what makes for a refreshing and unique look at religion, life, and politics. And, following the interview and conference papers, we have two additional works, one on vampires and the other on corporal punishment, to give this issue a fantastically eclectic blend. As the reader journeys from Islamic environmentalism to the depths of vampiric symbolism, she will find religion probed and prodded, contemplated and ruminated, in what I believe captures both the tireless struggle to move forward in understanding and the inspiring joy of celebrating progress made thus far.

I would like to thank Kile Jones for encouraging me to take up the task of editing this journal and for his guidance throughout the process. I would also like to thank our Editorial Advisory Board, Richard Hankins, Yvonne Augustine, Jeremiah Bowden, Brianne Donaldson, Nicolas Shake, Kimberly Anderson, Brooke Nelson, and all of the hard-working referees. And, last but not least, I would like to thank my wife and CJR media coordinator, Jessie Lyn Thompson, for her unconditional love and support.

Kyle Thompson, Editor, Claremont Journal of Religion