Editorial

I: Consonant with all the criteria of eligibility as specified in the journal website, the winner of the DOUGLAS MURRAY PRIZE of £1000 for 2017 had been announced as **Federico Zuliani** of The Italian Institute of Historical Studies, Naples. This was for his article: "Experiencing Chance: A Sixteenth-Century Italian Minister [Scipione Lentulo] Studying the Bible in Chiavenna," RRR 19, no. 3 (2017): 194-212. Congratulations to him, especially considering the high quality of very many articles of high quality in that volume. The award panel consisted of Mickey Mattox (Marquette), Charlotte Methuen (Glasgow) and Bruce Gordon (Yale). Some sample comments from the panel were:

> '*an extraordinary study of the reception of the Bible and the new tools for biblical interpretation in a remote area of the early Reformed tradition on the south side of the Alps'*

> *'well-researched, well-written, and expertly crafted'*

> *'an exemplary micro-historical study of little-known manuscripts and other sources with broader implications for understanding the Reformation Bible'*

II: It is unlikely, or at least I am unaware, that during William Shakespeare's 400th anniversary in 2016 or the Reformation's 500th anniversary in 2017 many or anyone recalled the fact that in the bard's almighty imagination, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (and Horatio too) were alumni of the Lutheran University of Wittenberg. But now someone has – in this article by Vladimir Brljak on Hamlet and soul-sleep. He devotes special attention to Hamlet's soliloquy, 'To be, or not to be', taking into account the textual differences in the three early editions of the play 1603–1623. The religious and theological undertones in the drama were noted in the past, so that Hamlet had been characterized as 'a young man from Wittenberg with a distinctly Protestant temperament, haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost.' Brljak explores the matter fully, arguing that the specific religio-theological issue determining Hamlet's introspective musing was the matter of soul-sleep. This was a controversial idea, arising out of the rejection of purgatory, proposing that in the intermediate state between death and resurrection, the soul is sleeping or unconscious, and thus not literally dead. The author alludes to early-Reformation discussions of the matter, especially by Luther, but also Calvin. The outbreak of polemical controversy over the issue in late-sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, Brljak affirms, helps account for the allusions in *Hamlet*, implying that Shakespeare was au fait with debate on the topic, historical and contemporary.

But the elusive vagueness of the issue in the play is due to the convention that in self-censoring, early-modern English drama, religious controversies had no more than a suggestive presence – as a 'subtext.'

The next article, by Charlotte Methuen, also leads us to Wittenberg. This time it is about hardball theological and political negotiations, pretty endless and ultimately fruitless, between the Wittenberg theologians and English Lutheran as well as not-so-Lutheran ones, especially in the late 1530s. Behind the exercise and its stutters lay the interest of Henry VIII, at the time diplomatically vulnerable due to his excommunication, so that a political alliance with the Schmalkald League was an option for him. The League, however, required subscription to fundamental Reformation doctrines. This involved long-stay English delegations to Wittenberg for doctrinal discussions between on the English side, among others, the committed Lutheran, Robert Barnes, and the sympathetic but more circumspect, Bishop Edward Foxe – and on the German side, chiefly Luther and Melanchthon. The exiled Lutheran Scot, Alexander Alesius, played an important role as an intermediary. Later there was also a Wittenberg delegation sent to London. Methuen shows that the Germans were right to be sceptical about Henry VIII (due to his much-publicized excoriation of Luther in the past). And the whole business ran into the sand permanently when the king redirected his church in a Catholic direction after 1538. The value of Methuen's study lies in its deep trawling of the Wittenbergers' correspondence which reveals clearly their perceptions and sometimes misconceptions about the elusive profile of the Reformation in England.

The final article also involves Anglo-German relations, this time in the late-Reformation era, highlighting another period when England was directly exposed to theological ideas from the Continent. Now they were more welcome in what had become a Protestant nation and church, doubtless due to the endorsement of Queen Elizabeth and then King James. This study is by Anthony Milton, also noted for his major study on the (very active) role of the Church of England delegation at the Synod of Dordrecht (1618/19). His interest in the article here is on the widely-approved dissemination in various formats of the Heidelberg Catechism in England (and Scotland too) from the 1570s to the early decades of the seventeenth century. Political undertones involving the Rhineland Palatinate were not absent, but Milton's chief concern is twofold. First: to help dispel the historiographical amnesia about the deep impact specifically Reformed theology had on the post-1558 Church of England – somewhat airbrushed out after 1660. Second: that while the Genevan and Zurich Consensus theologies already had a wide following in England, the Heidelberg theology did so too, not so much as an alternative, but as a clarifying and popular

supplement. The Heidelberg Catechism not only had a very successful dialogical format along with accompanying easily readable commentaries (all translated into English), it also combined covenant and predestinarian concepts in a dogmatically satisfying way. Further, its irenical tones were welcomed by many who in respect of the wider picture were distressed about the negative consequences of confessionalization, dividing Lutherans and Reformed, and seeing the need for pan-Protestant cohesion in view of Catholic revival.

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