

Editor's Introduction
The Complexity of Empires
Mark Douglas

Empires are complex things. Indeed, they prevail, where they do, in part because they have figured out how to manage complexity. And part of their management of that complexity has to do with their maintenance of the deepest yearnings of those who live under their control. That is, empires succeed where they figure out what to do with religion. Sometimes, they use religion to reinforce their control. Sometimes, they allow religious language to describe their control. Sometimes, they allow some religious expressions to function as release-valves for the pent-up energies and anxieties that empires produce. And sometimes, in spite of themselves, they are subverted by religion.

This past fall, thanks especially to the hard work of Columbia Theological Seminary professors Brennan Breed and Raj Nadella, Columbia Theological Seminary hosted a remarkable conference, "The Bible, Empire, and Reception History," that brought leading scholars from around the world to discuss the ways that scripture has been used by, for, and against empire throughout history. While this edition of *@ this point* can hardly do justice to the rich conversations of the conference (about which you can find more--including some videos [here](#)), it does use the conference as a leaping-off point for its topic: empire.

We are fortunate to have Safwat Marzouk, who was a presenter at the conference, write the lead essay for this edition. Egyptian by birth, Safwat teaches Old Testament at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Mrinalini Sebastian, another conference presenter, offers a thoughtful response as do Columbia Seminary Assistant Professor of Theology Tim Hartman (another conference participant) and Columbia Seminary alum Andrew Foster Connors. And Lauren Scharstein, another Columbia Seminary alum, has provided a valuable set of curricula to go along with their excellent essays.

Taken as a whole, these essays and the curricula offer a glimpse of the rich work being done in post-colonial biblical studies, of the amazing conference, and of the powerful implications that such an approach offers to those of who live in--though not necessarily of--empire. Having read them, it will be hard to look at the world around us in the same way again.