Eastern International Region
of the American Academy of Religion

AAR – Eastern International Region Annual Meeting
Sea Change: Religion, Cosmology, Environment

University of Toronto, Jackman Humanities Building
May 2-4, 2024

THURSDAY MAY 2
Registration 12:00-1:00 (JHB 319)
SESSION ONE – 1:00-2:30

Panel A – Nature and the Weather in Allegory and Practice

Location: JHB 616	**Aaron Ricker** (*Bishop's University*) Moderator
	Rev. Orresta James Paddock (*Cherry Hill Seminary*) Divine Destruction: Syncretized Expression of the Hellenic Gods and Natural Disasters
	Mojtaba Shahsavarialavijeh (*University of Toronto*) Skinning The Serpent: Tracing An Esoteric Allegory On The Annihilation Of Self-Hood, According To Najm Al-Din Al-Razi's (D. 654/1256) Sufi Commentary On The Qur'an
	Katarina Pejovic (*University of Toronto*) Balkan Weathermakers, Folk Magic, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Panel B – Traumas and Relief

Location: JHB 317	**Dawn Dickieson-Leger** (*Martin Luther University College*) Moderator
	Robbie Bendelius (*Princeton Theological Seminary*) Pseudo Methodius and Gaza, Reckoning with Mass Trauma and Displacement
	Josh Follweiler (*Moravian Theological Seminary*) Conflicting Cosmologies: Moravian Missionaries and Indigenous Peoples
	Durga Kale (*University of Calgary*) Seizing the Sea: Narrative Analysis on human-nature relationship from the West coast of India

BREAK – 2:30-2:45

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SESSION TWO – 2:45-4:15

Panel A – Religion in Shifting Contexts

Location: JHB 616	**Gaëlle Boscals de Réals** (*McGill University*) Moderator
	Sadaf Ahmed (*University of Toronto*) "It can't be boring:" Muslim Parents Re-Making Eid in the Diaspora
	Colin H. Simonds (*Queen's University*) Nagas in North America: Ecology, Colonialism, and the Limits of Tibetan Buddhist Practice in Diaspora
	Andrew Dade (*University of Toronto*) Ritual Labour and Buddhist Metaphysics: The Paṭṭhāna Puja of Unending Sound (1983)

Panel B – Turning Our Scholarly Gaze Inward: The Study of Religion and the University (Sea Change Preserved in the University of Toronto Archives

Location: Room B JHB 318	**Pamela Klassen** (*University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Alison Cleverley (*University of Toronto*) Shaping the early U of Toronto through green spaces
	Martin Pinckney (*University of Toronto*) The Success of Jewish Philosophy at the University of Toronto
	Sarang Patel (*University of Toronto*) Dissolving a Department: Strife, Finances, and Immigration
	Albert Y. Yang (*University of Toronto*) A Journey of Growth and Transformation: a digital humanities research project on the course syllabi of RLG1000Y from 1976-2024

Panel C – Gender and Christian Queer Studies

Location: JHB 317	**Rosemary Boissonneau** (*University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Ilona Rashkow (*Stony Brook University*) The Daughters of Zelophehad: Biblical Women's Rights Activists (?)

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	Elliot J. Weidenaar (*Union Theological Seminary*) Queering Christian Cosmology: Reimagining the Trinity, Creation, and the Virgin Mary as sadomasochistic polycule
	Trent Atkinson (*University of Toronto*) Getting Jacked for Jesus: On Muscular Christianity and American Universities

SESSION THREE – 4:30-5:30

Graduate Student Workshop – "Religious Studies Beyond the Discipline: A Roundtable Discussion"

	Htet Min Lwin (*York University*) Moderator
Location: JHB 318	**Damon Berry** (*St. Lawrence University*) Panelist
	Russell T. McCutcheon (*University of Alabama*) Panelist
	Thomas Whitley (*Florida State University*), Panelist

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FRIDAY MAY 3
Registration & Welcome – 8:30-9:00 AM (JHB 319)
SESSION ONE – 9:00-10:30

Panel A – Environmental Ethics and Theological Approaches

Location: JHB 317	**Josh Follweiler** (*Moravian Theological Seminary*) Moderator
	Albert Frolov (*University of Toronto*) Searching for a Interreligious Ecological Anthropology: Possible Contributions of Bernard Lonergan and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi
	Brett McLaughlin SJ (*Boston College*) Laudate Deum and the Demise of the Technocratic Paradigm: Pope Francis' Call for Situated Anthropocentrism
	Sarah Korang Sansa (*Protestant Theological University*) Ghana's Ecological Crisis, the Akan Chief, and the Christian Viceroy Rule: A Ghanaian Ecotheological Exploration

Panel B – Studies on Migration

Location: JHB 418	**Codey Lecchino** (*McMaster University*) Moderator
	Pamela Klassen (*University of Toronto*) and **Sarina Simmons** (*University of Toronto*) Settler Cosmologies of Land Along Manidoo Ziibi
	Josh Ereshefsky (*McMaster University*) World Building and Defending: The Transmission of Buddhist Cosmography from India to Japan
	William "Chip" Gruen (*Muhlenberg College*) Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion in Interfaith Exchange

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Panel C – Creation and Care

Location: JHB 318	**Susan McElcheran** (*University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Dawn Dickieson-Leger (*Martin Luther University College*) Art as Co-creative Eco-practice
	Russell D. Clarke (*Tyndale University*) Angels and Humanity in Creation Stewardship
	Anne-Marie Fowler (*University of Toronto*) Trees of Knowledge: How Artificial Learning methods might illuminate our call to the stewardship of Eden

BREAK – 10:30-10:40

SESSION TWO – 10:40-12:10

Panel A – Exploring the Persistence of Caste-Based Marginalization Across Domains of Gender, Religion, and Knowledge-Making

Location: JHB 317	**Anthony Scott** (*University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Navin Singh (*University of Toronto*) Brahmin, Chamaar, or Madrassi: The Reconstruction of Caste through Hindu Religious Spatialization in Post-Indenture Trinidad and Tobago
	Richard Wu (*University of Toronto*) The Marginalization of Indigenous Knowledges about Forests in Democratizing India
	Zuha Tanweer (*University of Toronto*) The queer (non)existence of Scheduled Castes in India
	Stephanie Duclos-King (*University of Toronto*) Respondent

Panel B – Reflections on Possession and Transformation

| Location: JHB 418 | **Miray Philips** (*University of Toronto*) Moderator |
| | **Tina Drakeford** (*University of Toronto*) Catholic Schools as Ecclesial Spaces: Educating for Justice and Sustainability |

	Codey Lecchino (*McMaster University*) Quebec's Situationship: How Catholic Aesthetics Entered French Secular Consciousness
	AmirAbbas Salehi (*McMaster University*) Captain Ahab and Possession: A Hegelian Treatment

Panel C – Liminality and Hegemony

Location: JHB 318	**Micah Streiffer** (*McMaster University*) Moderator
	Kainat Bashir (*University of Toronto*) Being Catholic the Punjabi Way: An Analysis of Material Acts of Religion in Punjab, Pakistan
	Joy Saade (*University of Toronto*) Policing Lebanese-Christian Purity – Predispositions of Maronite cultural hegemony during the COVID19 pandemic
	Rosemary Boissonneau (*University of Toronto*) Is Fertile Land (adamah) the Mother of All the Living in the Hebrew Bible?: Uncovering an Ancient Israelite Kinship Model of Human-Earth Relations

LUNCH – 12:10-1:30

SESSION THREE – 1:30-3:00

Panel A – Spaces, Viewpoints, and Connections

Location: JHB 317	**Colin H. Simonds** (*Queen's University*) Moderator
	Ilona Rashkow (*Stony Brook University*) Looking Through the Window: For Better or for Worse
	Thinley Gyatso (*University of Toronto*) Viewing the No View: Buddhist Approach Nature
	Maytal Lazarovic (*University of Toronto*) Barriers and Opportunities for Orthodox Environmental Engagement

Panel B – Interrogating Coptic Communal Boundaries and Belonging

Location: JHB 418	**Reid B. Locklin** (*St. Michael's College*, *University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Mariam Youssef (*California State University, Long Beach*) Redemption and Resurrection: Coptic Funeral Rites and Gendered Theologies of the Body
	Carolyn Ramzy (*Carleton University*) Coptic Digital Diasporas and Re-Claiming Coptic Narratives Offline
	Miray Philips (*University of Toronto*) Coptic Diaspora Mobilization and Generational Divides
	Mona Oraby (*Howard University*) Sealed in the Skin and on Paper: The Materiality of Communal Belonging in Egypt

Panel C – Inclusion and Disability

Location: JHB 318	**Brett McLaughlin SJ** (*Boston College*) Moderator
	Jacqueline Giesbrecht (*Queen's University*) Sacredness, Accessibility, and Inclusion: Disability Advocacy in the Christian Church
	Susan McElcheran (*University of Toronto*) Disability Theory's Critique of Rational Autonomy: Global Effects of Human Personhood and the Imago Dei

BREAK – 3:00-3:10

SESSION FOUR – 3:10-4:40

Panel A – Visions of Reform and Collective Action

Location: JHB 418	**Alex Grabiner** (*McGill University*) Moderator
	Amelia Madueño (*York University*) Chanting to the Flooded City: Soka Gakkai International, Hurricane Katrina, and Collective Memory

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	Yuki Shimada (*Aoyama Gakuin University*) Kotaro Tanaka's Vision for Education Reform in Post-World War II Japan: The Social Application of Catholic Natural Law Theory during a Period of National Crisis
	Theo Camara (*Northeastern Seminary of Roberts Wesleyan University*) Communal Mitigation of the Climate Crisis: Rectifying Colonialism in Christianity and Science

Panel B – Society for Comparative Research on Iconic and Performative Texts (SCRIPT)

	Kevin J. White (*University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Rachel Fell McDermott (*Barnard College*) Kali in a Time of Hurt Sentiment
Location: JHB 318	**Michael Como** (*Columbia University*) Entextualized Objects and Cultic Revolution in Eighth Century Japan
	David Dault (*Loyola University Chicago*) Deflating the Agency of Objects: A Critical Materialism for Iconic Texts

Keynote Address – 5:15 PM

Location: Paul Cadario Conference Centre	**Dr. Hillary Kaell** (*William Dawson Research Chair, McGill University*) A Multibeing Manifesto: Using Tools from Religious Studies to Rethink Ecological Change
Note: Keynote address will be followed by a reception, hosted in the same location	

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SATURDAY MAY 4

EIR BUSINESS MEETING – 8:30-9:30

Location: JHB 318	All attendees are welcome to join us for the EIR's Business Meeting, where we will share updates for the Region and announce the winners of our Student Paper Awards

SESSION ONE – 9:30-11:00

Panel A – Indigenous Modalities

Location: JHB 318	**Theo Camara** (*Northeastern Seminary of Roberts Wesleyan University*) Moderator
	Janna Martin (*University of Guelph*) and **Sarina Simmons** (*University of Toronto*) Being Mennonite on the Haldimand Tract: Practicing an "Ethics of Incommensurability" from Treaty Land
	Edward Scrimgeour (*University of Toronto*) Perfunctory and Performative: Reconsidering Criticism of Land Acknowledgments in Canada
	Kevin J. White (*University of Toronto*) Grief, Adaptability, and the Anthropocene from an Indigenous Perspective

Panel B – Materialities and Modalities

Location: JHB 418	**Kainat Bashir** (*University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Gerard Jameson (*Gerard Jameson*) Franchising Faith: The McDonaldization of Black New Religious Movements Through Social Media
	Chiho Tokita (*University of Toronto*) Materiality of Excess: One Too Many Candles?
	Gaëlle Boscals de Réals (*McGill University*) The Inclusion Of Globalized Culture Into The Taiwanese Religious Sphere: The Example Of Longqi Wenheng Hall

Panel C – Ecology and Philanthropy

Location: JHB 317	**Robbie Bendelius** (*Princeton Theological Seminary*) Moderator
	Micah Streiffer (*McMaster University*) Helping the Rains to Flow: "V'hayah Im Shamoa" and Ecological Responsibility in Reform Judaism
	Alex Grabiner (*McGill University*) Cause and Effect in the Anthropocene: Tzu Chi's Recycling and Environmental Ethics

BREAK – 11:00-11:10

SESSION TWO – 11:10-12:40

Panel A – Exploring the Poetics of Spirituality

Location: JHB 318	**Alexander Hampton** (*University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Bianca Quilliam (*University of Toronto*) Observing Kenosis in the Poetry of Hadewijch and John Donne
	Siena von Rosen (*University of Toronto*) Touching God: Immanence and Transcendence in Post-Reformation Poetry of George Herbert and Thomas Traherne
	James Nowak (*University of Toronto*) "Affective perception" as a means for overcoming the anthropocentric construction of nature in modernity in the poetics of Archibald Lampman and Gerard Manley Hopkins

Panel B – Hindu Missiology and the Christian Comparativist: Book Panel on *Hindu Mission, Christian Mission*

Location: JHB 418	**Kainat Bashir** (*University of Toronto*) Moderator
	Jeffrey D. Long (*Elizabethtown College*) Friendly Amendments? Perspectives of a Ramakrishna Mission Theologian
	Corrine C. Dempsey (*Nazareth College*) Contested Conversions or Sacred Power? Ethnography and Comparative Theology
	Michelle Voss (*Emmanuel College, University of Victoria*) A Question of Coloniality? Comparative Method and the Politics of Empire
	Reid B. Locklin (*St. Michael's College, University of Toronto*) *Respondent*

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Panel C – Sacred Texts and Sacred Landscapes	
Location: JHB 317	**William "Chip" Gruen** (*Muhlenberg College*) Moderator
	Annabel Abbey (*University of Toronto*) The Arctic Raven: Inuit Cosmologies and Modern Implications
	Audrey Miatello (*University of Toronto*) Reconnecting to Nature in the 21st Century: Considering Laudato Si' as a Guide
	Swamini Sagar (*University of Toronto*) Interpreting Sacred Texts: A Reader-Response Analysis of The Bhagavad Gita
	Aneri Patel (*University of Toronto*) Beyond Rituals: Climate Change Impacts on Sacred Waters and Conservation Strategies

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Abstracts (listed in alphabetical order, by surname)

Annabel Abbey (*University of Toronto*) The Arctic Raven: Inuit Cosmologies and Modern Implications

I will discuss Inuit creation narratives and oral traditions featuring the Arctic raven, or tulugaq in Inuktitut, for my paper submission. Amongst the various Inuit communities located in Canada, oral storytelling serves as a way to convey cultural information and history. In Yup'ik, Unalit, and Aivilik traditions, ravens are credited as creators of the world and bringers of light. The birds are significant to Inuit cosmology and act as entities that allow these communities to situate themselves in the physical world. Due to the variety of Inuit storytelling across the Arctic, ravens often go between being gluttonous tricksters and heroic creators. In many accounts, Raven, the creator, discovers and nourishes the first human beings. Similarly, he has stolen and brought daylight to humankind. As this animal is significant in Inuit traditions, it is essential to consider the current failed relationship with these animals caused by environmental and ecological factors. The second half of my paper will discuss the clash between the Canadian government's waste management efforts and the creation of mass dumpsites. These dumpsites have become homes to "trash animals," such as ravens, and treat them like vermin to be exterminated. Treating these creatures as discarded trash has turned the once powerful creator into a pest that lives in landfills.

Sadaf Ahmed (*University of Toronto*) "It can't be boring:" Muslim Parents Re-Making Eid in the Diaspora

This paper grapples with contemporary Muslim parents' sense of urgency to make Islamic holidays "fun" for their children in Canada. These second-generation Muslim parents, raised by what they call "immigrant parents" construe their own childhood experiences of Islamic holidays as "boring" or otherwise lackluster. I theorize this feeling of insufficient festivity: what festive registers were there even if now recast as absent a generation later? Through tacit observations of their parents in their childhoods, second generation Muslim parents grew up to be keenly aware of the ways in which the figure of immigrant is both celebrated and maligned in public imaginaries. Their embodied understanding of the immigrant's hypervisibility now shapes how they pass down Islam. Whether the "lack" of gifts, games, and holiday décor, or the "excessive" focus on formality and food, the yardstick through which these now grown children measure "immigrant parenting" is calibrated through majoritarian norms. If the diasporic condition is quintessentially one marked by the interruption of life-forms in irrecuperable ways, my ethnographic method reveals the intricacies and stakes of this irrecuperability: although my interlocutors are resolute Muslims eager to transmit Islam to their children, Islam's encumbrance in a hostile geopolitics moves these parents to perform – reflexively and unreflexively – the creation of an anti-cultural Islam in Multicultural Canada. Muslim parents' labours to curate fun festivity become a site to view Islam's contemporary formation through ethnic disinheritance.

Trent Atkinson (*University of Toronto*) Getting Jacked for Jesus: On Muscular Christianity and American Universities

Arising out of Victorian England and fears about a changing society, Muscular Christianity was a movement devoted to the promotion of sport, male fitness, and traditional masculinity as central tenants of - largely Protestant – Christianity. Fears of the superannuation of men, sedentary lifestyles, and the vice of the urban city, Muscular Christianity presented men with a worldview that told them they were the heads of households and that it was imperative for them to look good while doing it. Reaching the United States at the tail-end of the Gilded Age, Muscular Christianity took root in the American university system, with college football and the National College Athletic Association, or NCAA, becoming deeply intertwined with the project of Muscular Christianity. This paper then, traces the history of Muscular Christianity through Victorian England, Gilded Age America, and into the twenty-first century. While much scholarship has been written on Muscular Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, my own work aims to fill the scholarly gap in twenty-first century examinations of the movement.

Kainat Bashir (*University of Toronto*) Being Catholic the Punjabi Way: An Analysis of Material Acts of Religion in Punjab, Pakistan

This paper focuses on the performative rituals practiced by the pilgrims at the Catholic shrine of Mariamabad, in Punjab, Pakistan. Each of the religious practices, (vows, processions, and healing) is woven with central analytical questions that bring the performative aspect of the ritual in conversation with the contemporary social issues, and the everyday political discourses related to the agency of Christian religious minorities of Punjab, Pakistan. For example, through my scholarly focus and fieldwork, I analyze how taking part in religious processions (julūs) help Punjabi Catholics achieve visibility as an individual (minority) religious group? I engage in the conversation about minority visibility and the materiality of the

presented central objects at the pilgrimage site such as the tiara (tāj) and veil (chādor) to examine the porosity and fluidity of the social and religious boudaries as they are negotiated by the Catholic minorites of Punjab amidst a vast Muslim majority.

Robbie Bendelius (*Princeton Theological Seminary*) Pseudo Methodius and Gaza, Reckoning with Mass Trauma and Displacement

Thinking apocalyptically is a natural result of communal trauma, a means to cope with a fractured reality that not only disrupts earthly but heavenly ideals. The Apocalypse of Pseudo Methodius answers the questions of the arab conquest of the seventh century through an eschatological battle that ends with the divine lordship of Christ through the agency of earthly kingship. In this paper, I will use the Apocalypse of Pseudo Methodius to see how medieval displaced Christians understood their trauma and how it is a valuable source for displaced Christians today thanks to how it speaks to present realities of power. I will show how medieval apocalypses, despite awkward imagery and language for modern readers, create a rich tapestry in which we can connect with previous generations of Christians to pray and understand trauma as well as sit in grief together. This imagery, which revolves around divine and earthly powers, shows the complexity of identity for displaced Christians during the 8th century and the question of individual agency for and against continental shaping powers that is highly applicable today.

Rosemary Boissonneau (*University of Toronto*) Is Fertile Land (adamah) the Mother of All the Living in the Hebrew Bible?: Uncovering an Ancient Israelite Kinship Model of Human-Earth Relations

I believe that the escalating ecological and climate crises are deeply interrelated with the need for reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settlers, and that these urgent concerns center around conflicting views about humanity's relationship with the land. Many biblical texts that seem to view the land as a passive object of conquest and empire have been the focus of biblical scholarship and have been used to favour interpretations that support anthropocentrism, colonialism, and imperialism. There are, however, biblical understandings of the land as an active agent in the relationship between God and humanity, particularly the much less studied perspective that is based on the portrayal of adamah (אֲדָמָה) in the Hebrew Bible's Yahwist tradition. I propose that in the Yahwist's primeval narratives (Gen 2-9), adamah, meaning "arable land" or "fertile soil" is depicted as an active agent and the mother of living things that collaborates creatively with a paternally imaged God. In this maternal role, adamah serves as an integral connection between the divine, the human and the rest of creation modeled on the ancient Israelite societal unit of bet ab, or "house of the father." This model places the human, the land, and God in a relationship of reciprocal family responsibility and care for the whole of creation, and it eschews the hierarchal, dualistic thinking that supports colonial and anthropocentric perspectives of land.

Theo Camara (*Northeastern Seminary of Roberts Wesleyan University*) Communal Mitigation of the Climate Crisis: Rectifying Colonialism in Christianity and Science

What do Christian mission and scientific discovery hold in common? Unfortunately, remnants of colonialism are a bond that these two worlds share. Christianity has strong roots in colonial practices, from the crusades to the Americas, and impacts of this history can still be witnessed in modern evangelical movements and missionary expeditions. Parachute science (or "colonial science") has also become an increasingly evident problem globally. Scientists from the Global North will do research in small communities of the Global South, publish their findings, and leave without ever communicating with the local population. Not only does this generate concern for any solutions or results of that research, but it also unmindful to the knowledge of a local community. Colonialism in both Christianity and science is unmistakably problematic, but especially so given the current climate crisis.

Russell D. Clarke (*Tyndale University*) Angels and Humanity in Creation Stewardship

The significance of creation stewardship is often overlooked in many churches, yet this is central to understanding humanity as made in God's image. Stewardship as a principle will be explored and expanded to incorporate the priestly element of praise as part of humanity's representation of God on earth. Although the earth is the primary theater of human praise, all creation praises God; thus, there is an opportunity to explore the heavenly element of creation and how this relates to humanity. Angels are spiritual creatures who act as God's entourage in heaven and messengers on earth, providing a point of contact with humanity between earth and heaven; therefore, angelology contributes to a broader theology of creation. To better understand angels and heaven in this discussion, two key texts on angels will be explored and examined: Pseudo-Dionysius's Celestial Hierarchy and Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics. The analysis of

each text will be brought into dialogue with a general meaning of 'angel' in scripture, and Psalm 148 and Revelation 4-5 will be used specifically to highlight the key insights of Pseudo-Dionysius and Karl Barth. In conclusion, humanity joins with the angels and creation in praise; humanity as stewards and priests leading worship under the lordship Jesus, and angels as messengers and witnesses to God's kingdom, until Jesus' return when the angels will cease being messengers, while humanity continues as stewards.

Alison Cleverley (*University of Toronto*) Shaping the early U of Toronto through green spaces

Nineteenth-century maps, architectural drawings, and photographs show that the large lawn and the ravined park on U of T's campus have been part of the plan for the university since before the building design was chosen and before the question of which Christian denomination would run the institution was settled. That lawn and park have remained part of the landscape ever since, and are still prominent features of the campus today. In this paper, I look at these archival images to ask what role the green spaces played in shaping and naturalizing the university, how maps and proposals played a part in laying claims to the land, and how the relationship between nature and humans that underlay this plan fit into and reinforced a Christian cosmology.

Michael Como (*Columbia University*) Entextualized Objects and Cultic Revolution in Eighth Century Japan

Abstract TBA

Andrew Dade (*University of Toronto*) Ritual Labour and Buddhist Metaphysics: The Paṭṭhāna Puja of Unending Sound (1983)

After nearly two decades of experimenting with the disastrous Burmese Way to Socialism, Burma‚Äôs leader of the 1962 Revolutionary Council military coup d‚Äô√©tat, General Ne Win, initiated a return to Buddhist nationalism. Ne Win‚Äôs Buddhist revival involved massive shifts in attitudes and labour directed towards state patronage of Buddhism. One branch of the work included reinvigorating a Buddhist library built at the time of the Sixth Buddhist Council (1954-1956) and installing a head librarian to oversee its operations. My paper situates this head librarian author and one of his most popular texts, The Pa·π≠·πìh∆Åna Puja of Unending Sound (1983), within the context of this revival. Where the Burmese Way to Socialism had shunned lavish and expensive Buddhist rituals as distractions from fostering strong socialist autonomy, the Buddhist nationalist revival now sanctioned protectionist ritual devotion epitomized in The Pa·π≠·πìh∆Åna Puja of Unending Sound. This text marshals a metaphysically rich Buddhism emplaced within its full cosmology overriding inclinations towards a rationalist, demythologized Buddhism. In my paper, I highlight examples of this metaphysical and cosmological content with its modes of delivery (Pali-Burmese translation, commentary, historiography, poetry, catechism, and ritual guide). One evident approach to the text demands contextualizing it within the ideological propaganda of Ne Win's Buddhist nationalism. However, that reductive lens does not satisfactorily bring light to the ways by which Unending Sound fosters and mediates a longue durée Buddhist cosmological imagination for revolutionary purposes. For all Ne Win's Buddhist patronage, he was ousted by the pro-democracy movement of 1988.

David Dault (*Loyola University Chicago*) Deflating the Agency of Objects: A Critical Materialism for Iconic Texts

Abstract TBA

Gaëlle Boscals de Réals (*McGill University*) The Inclusion Of Globalized Culture Into The Taiwanese Religious Sphere: The Example Of Longqi Wenheng Hall

This paper aims to explore a recent way to attract tourists and worshippers to the temple of Longqi Wenheng Hall (Longqi Wenheng Dian 龍崎文衡殿), Longqi District, Taiwan. Since 2013, the temple committee has been admitting replicas of pop culture movie icons like Marvel's Avengers, or Paramount's Transformers into the main hall, together with the principal deity Guandi 關帝 and others. This comes to complement the cute renderings of the gods derived from Japanese kawaii (可愛 in Mandarin, or "cute") aesthetics, the imported curiosities from Japan, and the life-size models of DC's Batman and Disney's Elsa and Olaf in the exhibition hall.

Those decisions are understood as touristic ventures by the visitors and members of the temple committee, raising questions about the "marketization" of religiosity and how it might shade into "hybridization". I contend that new forms of visitor-temples ties have led to a re-packaging of services for broader appeal, including leveraging the popularity of American and Japanese cultures to engage younger generations. However, such strategies may incite debates as they

touch upon themes like "authenticity," sacredness, and culture. I argue that Longqi Wenheng Hall navigates this by emphasizing the thematic ties and donation status of the aforementioned touristic props, thus positioning itself at the border between surprising and consistent.

Corrine C. Dempsey (*Nazareth College*) Contested Conversions or Sacred Power? Ethnography and Comparative Theology

Dempsey brings Locklin's work into conversation with South Indian Christian and North American Hindu ritual practices. Based on ethnographical study, this paper considers how such religious practices "out of place" and on the ground challenge overwrought religious distinctions. This in turn opens into questions raised by Locklin's theological work regarding false dichotomies set up by formalized conversion controversies. Fodder for this paper emerges from practices in Kerala State performed by high caste Syrian Christians for whom conversion is a distant memory and among more recently converted Dalit members of the Church of South India. Together they lead us to ask not so much about the changes in translation but what gets preserved and why. Another point of reference is ritual continuity and change within a Hindu temple community in Upstate New York, adding to reflections on the extent to which religions themselves "convert" when practiced outside their normative homes, stretching to reach new populations. Whereas Locklin argues that the language of conversion hints less at shifting allegiances than with "transformation, purification, and integrative ascent," on-the-ground examples of cross-religious exchanges, also little invested in allegiances, prioritize instead sacred power, serving as a grand leveler.

Dawn Dickieson-Leger (*Martin Luther University College*) Art as Co-creative Eco-practice

Finding ways to engage people in a committed way to the work of environmental sustainability has always been a challenge, even in religious communities. Re-claiming our original vocations as co-creators as mandated in Genesis 2 helps us engage with environmental issues less as problems of survival but from a position of empathy and connection with God, the earth, and all its creatures. This paper proposes such a recovery, aided by creative practice and re-connection with the Creator, compelling us to intentionally join in the Earth's flourishing.

Art and creative practice help us see ourselves as co-carers and co-creators rather than consumers. Creative practice teaches us to pay attention, connect with our surroundings, find beauty in unusual places, be generous with ourselves and others. These are all ways to engage our human calling to inspire ourselves and others towards environmental stewardship. Recovering our identity and vocation as partners in creation is found particularly in the writings of Matthew Fox, leaning on the mystical tradition of Meister Eckhart and others.

As the primary contributor to the climate crisis, humans have the distinct role of actively destroying the thing we have helped to create. And, yet, our vocation remains, to be partners with God in the earth' flourishing. Recovering our vocation emboldens all humans to claim our place in sacred creation. We can achieve this through a spiritual practice of creation through art.

Tina Drakeford (*University of Toronto*) Catholic Schools as Ecclesial Spaces: Educating for Justice and Sustainability

Catholic magisterial documents speak of the ways that Catholic education should be educating students for the work of justice and to be transformative forces in the world. Ontario Catholic schools are a unique expression of Catholic Education that is centrally administered and funded by the government while still seeking to define its distinctive identity in Catholic Education. Using Ontario schools as a case study, this paper will show how rooting our understanding of this distinctive identity in the nature of Catholic schools as ecclesial spaces provides the framework for schools to enact the vision of Catholic education as promoters of a more just and sustainable future for the Church.

Stephanie Duclos-King (*University of Toronto*) The queer (non)existence of Scheduled Castes in India

How do gender and sexual minorities from oppressed castes in modern-day India experience accommodations within law and social order? In this essay, I explore the intersection between caste and non-normative gendered and sexual identities from the standpoint of being rendered an "other" in Indian law and social order. I argue that the Brahminical caste structure and legal system have worked in conjunction to invisibilize oppressed-caste queer individuals by operating within rigid categorizations of caste and gender, robbing Scheduled Caste members from accessing the same legal protections as other queer groups. Secondly, the lens of "untouchability" through which transgender members of SCs are filtered through excludes them from mainstream LGBTQ+ activism under the phenomenon of

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"homohindunationalism." By studying the census of India to explore gaps in representation and analyzing public demands and discourse of dominant queer activists, I illustrate the legal and social invisibility experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals belonging to SCs in India. Tying these systemic issues to possible solutions and paths forward, I posit the need to center the intersections between colonialism and brahminical supremacy as a crucial component of decolonization efforts in India, as well as the utilization of "homopopulism" and "intersectional subordination" as effective theoretical lenses to approaching narratives around caste and gender.

Josh Ereshefsky (*McMaster University*) World Building and Defending: The Transmission of Buddhist Cosmography from India to Japan

Studies of religious cosmology tend to overlook a religion's conception of the physical world—what is often termed religious "cosmography." A religion's cosmography encompasses both the spatial arrangement of the world and the incorporation of its doctrines within that framework.
This paper begins by tracing early Buddhist cosmographic sources—that is to say, the first Buddhist descriptions of the world—written in India in the early centuries of the Common Era. Using these colourful texts, I offer a brief tour of the traditional Buddhist world model, highlighting the integration of doctrine and geography. I note the location(s) of gods, humans, and hell-beings.

Next, I present evidence of the transmission of Buddhist cosmography from India to Japan, where it found widespread acceptance. This (literal) worldview remained unchallenged in Japan until the sixteenth century, when the arrival of European sciences sparked a conflict between competing cosmographies. I introduce some of the players and questions at the center of this conflict. For example, the debate over the world's shape—flat or round—and the implications this held for Japanese Buddhists.

Josh Follweiler (*Moravian Theological Seminary*) Conflicting Cosmologies: Moravian Missionaries and Indigenous Peoples

In 2012, Moravian churches in Alaska joined together to form the United Alaska Ministry Group. Four years later, the UAMG was expelled from the Worldwide Moravian Church and ceased to recognize the authority of the Unity Board. The reason for the fissure was, in part, the UAMG's incorporation of Indigenous ritual practices, including ceremonies for the raising of the dead. In this case, the confluence of Indigenous and white Protestant missionary cosmological understandings resulted in disagreements and separation. No doubt, we could also find examples where contradictory cosmologies led to violence. Traditional understandings suggest that different cosmological beliefs nearly always result in conflicts and disputes.

The New Madrid earthquakes provide us with a contrary example. In the early 1800s, a series of earthquakes occurred that were so massive that they forever changed the landscape of the southern Appalachian mountains. The topography was not the only thing affected by the quakes. When their belief that the quakes were a sign of "Old Earth's" impending death failed to materialize, Cherokees approached Moravian missionaries to familiarize themselves with an alternative cosmology.

The Nicaraguan earthquake of 1972 and the devastating hurricanes that affected the Caribbean remain unstudied and fertile examples to probe the intersection of conflicting cosmologies and their effects. Particularly during times of crisis, people often engage in discussions that heighten their awareness of cosmological understandings. Such periods may lead individuals and communities to explore meaning and their place in the universe. Using primary source material, this paper will demonstrate that while conflicting cosmological understandings often resulted in discord, they were equally likely to lead to curiosity.

Anne-Marie Fowler (*University of Toronto*) Trees of Knowledge: How Artificial Learning methods might illuminate our call to the stewardship of Eden

Chapters 1-3 of Genesis depict Divine Creation. The event of Eden and human exile from the garden narrate a clash between the divine command to human stewardship of the Earth and human urges to emulate the divine creative act through mastery of its materials (Soloveitchik 1992 [1965]). Adam and Eve's encounter with the Tree of Knowledge made the irreconcilability of this clash visible, and in doing so illumined the human relationship with the dual event of Creation: a Genesis from nothing and an ongoing stewardship of Creation within which the novelty of Genesis is realized in each emerging moment. (Rashi, Maimonides 1963, Cohen 1922, Cohen 1972 [1919], Cohen and Bruckstein 2004 [1908], Kavka 2004, Wiedebach 2010). While this collision is already given to examinations of the human call to

care for Creation, I want to bring selected readings of Genesis to the setting of a virtual Eden, that of the artificial learning system. Emboldened by human-accorded methods of reason and trees of fundamental decision, the artificial learning system becomes both master and steward of the materials it is gifted. How does the emergence of artificial systems learning methods illuminate our readings of Creation and Genesis? How might we read human emulation of the divine through the lens of the machine? I will propose an interactive reading that links these artificial learning methods to the methods of Genesis, with visits to Eden, to the Great Flood (Gen 6-9) and the emergence of language at Babel (Gen 11).

Albert Frolov (*University of Toronto*) Searching for a Interreligious Ecological Anthropology: Possible Contributions of Bernard Lonergan and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

The paper will analyze how the ideas of two prominent modern theologians of Catholic and Islamic faith traditions, Bernard Lonergan (d. 1984) and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960) respectively, can be harnessed to ground a tentative new interreligious eco-ethics in which the transposed notion of "human being" remains at the center of attention. Nursi's theology applies to the needs of modern environmentalist ethics thanks to its unique metaphysical outlook rooted in the Holy Qur'an which considers every created entity a manifestation of divine oneness, knowledge, and mercy. One of the key elements deriving from this outlook is the Sufi concept of "perfect human being" (al-insan al-kamil) as God's vicegerent on Earth whose very presence protects nature. Lonergan's theology, in contrast, would base foundations of any world eco-ethics on the invariant, universal basic structure of human conscious intentionality (our practically fallible yet ontologically inherent predisposition toward being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible). This structure grounds – but not essentializes – each of our further epistemological, metaphysical, and axiological endeavors. The paper will demonstrate how Lonergan's discourse on this invariant structure of human intentionality may allow to transpose the core elements of Nursi's metaphysics of the sacred to interreligious eco-ethics that is itself grounded in psychological anthropology rather than in metaphysics. Both authors show, that within their respective theological universes, human beings, as possessors of the unique gift of free will, are predestined to rule over their natural environment. For both, however, only "authentic" human beings can execute this lofty office in a truly responsible manner.

Jacqueline Giesbrecht (*Queen's University*) Sacredness, Accessibility, and Inclusion: Disability Advocacy in the Christian Church

In many conceptualizations of the sacred, the sacred requires an "other," – the profane or an out-group. In ancient Israel, this group included people with disabilities, deemed "defected," who were not allowed in the Israelite religious community's sacred spaces. While some Christian circles still emphasize this "cursed" understanding of disability, there are other contemporary Christian theologians and disability advocacy groups that emphasize a liberatory theology of disability. Using Foucault's concept of utopia and heterotopia, I demonstrate that these theologians and organizations offer the possibility of a sacred space that is inclusive rather than exclusive and other. I then consider the potential contributions of this inclusive sacred in society more broadly and the guidance it could provide in the pursuit of a more equitable and sustainable future.

Alex Grabiner (*McGill University*) Cause and Effect in the Anthropocene: Tzu Chi's Recycling and Environmental Ethics

Since White's (1967) landmark essay, Buddhism has been held up as an example of an "environmentalist" religion. This assertion generally rests on two ideas: first, that Buddhism's cosmology is more eco-centric than other religions, and second, that the Buddhist concept of interdependent origination is an analogous framework of understanding to ecological interdependence. In opposition to this, some scholars have claimed that there is little canonical support for a Buddhist understanding of ecological connectedness, nor a theological anthropology that places humans on an equal footing with nature. More recently, the socio-historical reality of Buddhism's environmentalist credentials has been called into question over individual and institutional Buddhist practices that are environmentally exploitative or destructive. This paper complicates this debate by examining the Tzu Chi Foundation, a Buddhist institution that is materially engaged in environmental protection without relying on the theological commitments which are generally understood to ground Buddhism's eco-friendliness. Instead, a Buddhist cosmology centered on the human creative agency of karmic cause and effect provides a foundation for the organization's recycling projects and environmentalism.

William "Chip" Gruen (*Muhlenberg College*) Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion in Interfaith Exchange

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The practice of interfaith dialogue has undergone significant reformulations since its modern inception in the late 19th century. Increasingly, both scholarly and popular discourse on religious diversity have sought to reframe what counts as religion - moving from a Jewish / Christian dichotomy, to a Abrahamic traditions threesome, to a more inclusive model that recognizes the relevance and importance of indigenous traditions, traditions rooted in South Asia or East Asia, and new religious movements. Though increasingly diverse categories of tradition were marked for inclusion in the category of religion, other criteria for participation have emerged, largely due to the practicalities of the dialogue model and its stated objectives. This paper considers several manifestations of the interfaith model over time, analyzing assumptions that are implicit in the interfaith model that affect who participates, the ground rules for that participation, and strategies for understanding those who either chose not to participate or are excluded from the conversation. How religion is defined in these new formulations, how normative claims about the nature of religion affect inclusion/exclusion from the conversation, and how basic assumptions of the goals of such dialogue affect the process of dialogue itself will be central to analysis and conclusions.

Thinley Gyatso (*University of Toronto*) Viewing the No View: Buddhist Approach Nature

In the first half of the thirteenth century, a large chunk of texts as ecocritical genres were produced and became the popular subject matter for everyday religious practice throughout Himalayan regions. The writings of those texts, in a particular form of environmental imagination, were imprinted, influenced, and situated in specific landscapes that are subtle and complex.

This paper explores the expression of environmental experience through the mgur, or songs of spiritual realization. It will focus on the spiritual songs written by an influential Buddhist master named Rangjung Dorje in the thirteenth century. He was the third Karmapa, the head of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Buddhism in the Himalayan regions. By reading his texts, the paper explores how these texts integrate, to varying extents, human-environmental connection and their religious precepts. It investigates how the environmental imaginations of the nonhuman world interacted with humans and offered ways of living together spiritually and physically. Such texts offer an alternative ground for studying religious approaches to ecology and help understand ecocritical contributions to texts and cultural attitudes toward nature. The landscape as a sacred space offers beneficial environmental outcomes for the people in the Himalayan regions who follow place-based religious practices. It shapes various socioreligious norms that contribute to establishing a sustainable environment. Living with nature by harmonizing the habitat represents a sacred space established through ethical orientation.

Gerard Jameson (*Gerard Jameson*) Franchising Faith: The McDonaldization of Black New Religious Movements Through Social Media

This paper explores George Ritzer's (1940 -) concept of McDonaldization and compares its four principles (efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control) in Black new religious movements (NRMs) that form on social media. McDonaldized efficiency dictates that every aspect of online Black NRMs is geared toward the minimization of time, including spreading the doctrine and followers going from ignorant to informed in an instant. McDonaldized calculability leads virtual followers of Black NRMs to believe they are getting a large amount of religious knowledge for free or very little money through electronic contributions. McDonaldized predictability guarantees that no matter where and when an adherent accesses the online material, they will receive the same messaging every time when interacting with Black NRMs online. This applies to the spiritual guide and lay leaders who have highly repetitive, highly routine, and predictable tasks. McDonalized control ensures standardized behaviors for all adherents, both those living with the spiritual guide and the followers who watch through social media. This paper uses the encyclopedic comparison approach to set the goal, mode, and scale; as well as select comparands, and describe the data. I argue based on these comparisons that: 1) even though the McDonaldization principles were originally devised in 1983 and Black NRMs evolved during the Social Media Age (1997 - present), they are still relevant today; and 2) over time, offshoots of online Black NRMs emerge more quickly than offline by utilizing the four principles of McDonaldization.

Durga Kale (*University of Calgary*) Seizing the Sea: Narrative Analysis on human-nature relationship from the West coast of India

The relationship between humans and the sea was narrativized as a duel between two demi-gods in western India of the medieval period. The religious texts are replete with stories about the lord of the sea and the demigod who was believed to have created the western coast of India. Using the narratives from local Hindu Purana literature, this paper extends the narration with an ethnographic bend to examine the modern sensibilities around the sea as a resource. The origin

story of a demigod creating the west coast of India also influences the attitudes towards resource extraction, fishing, maritime travel and trade, and other sea-related activities. Using network analysis, the paper maps the religious narrativization of human-sea relationship in the region of Konkan in west coast of India. The paper also focuses on caste-based narrative around access and procurement of resources that stem from the religious narratives in the region. This discussion traces the two characters - the lord of the sea and the demigod who creates the coastline - as models for select social groups to elucidate the relationship with the natural world. The discussion will segue into the question of personhood with respect to the seascape that lies at the heart of these religious narratives. The paper will be of interest for Religious Studies scholars, anthropologists and historians on Indian ocean World, more broadly.

Pamela Klassen (*University of Toronto*) and **Sarina Simmons** (*University of Toronto*) Settler Cosmologies of Land Along Manidoo Ziibi

Manidoo Ziibi, or Spirit River (also known as Rainy River) has been a place of spiritual and political significance for many Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island for thousands of years. Located on Treaty 3 territory in northwestern Ontario, the river is home to the largest concentration of burial mounds in Canada and was the centre of a continent-wide trading network for millennia. Today, the burial mounds are stewarded by the Rainy River First Nations (Anishinaabeg), who own and operate an Ojibwe Historical Centre called Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung (Place of the Long Rapids).

In this paper, we examine how settlers have narrated Manidoo Ziibi's proper meaning and use through an analysis of two settler groups who arrived on the river in the mid-twentieth century. In the 1950s, a group of archaeologists led by Walter Kenyon excavated several mounds and transported the contents—including ancestral remains—to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Because of the archaeological significance of these discoveries to the Canadian nation, Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung was designated a National Historic Site in 1969. At the nearby Rainy River First Nations reserve, Conservative Mennonites from Minnesota and southern Ontario also arrived on Manidoo Ziibi to plant the Manitou Rapids Mission Church. While museum workers dug up the earth at Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung, Mennonite settlers tilled the soil on their newly built farms surrounding the First Nations reserve. We analyze the ways that settlers have narrated these archaeological and religious initiatives to demonstrate the significance of overlapping cosmologies of land in shaping the landscape of Manidoo Ziibi.

Maytal Lazarovic (*University of Toronto*) Barriers and Opportunities for Orthodox Environmental Engagement

Religions hold the capacity to influence people's values, perceptions, and ultimately, choices. Accordingly, when it comes to the increasingly dire need to escalate sustainability efforts to combat the ecological crisis, religion can act as a catalyst for – or barrier towards – engaging in pro-environmental action. The primary goal of this research is to understand why Jewish Orthodox communities in North America seldom participate in environmental action. Empirical studies on environmental action in faith communities is extremely limited, especially in non-Christian, non-USA contexts. As such, it is imperative to begin to fill apparent gaps in the literature to better understand the capacity for conservative environmentalism. We employ qualitative methodologies through in-depth semi-structured interviews and coding data using inductive thematic analysis and framing theory. Our interim results shed light on barriers to Orthodox environmental engagement, including the lack of existing priority for environmental considerations, as well as the association of the environmental movement with the left-wing/progressive movement. Among the opportunities for Orthodox environmental engagement are aligning environmental programming with Orthodox expectations/norms and encouraging/uplifting halakhic (Jewish legal) and/or Torah support for environmentalism.

Codey Lecchino (*McMaster University*) Quebec's Situationship: How Catholic Aesthetics Entered French Secular Consciousness

Lecchino's work delves into Quebec's transformative Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, exploring its complicated relationship with Catholicism and the consequent reshaping of the province's identity. The essay examines the interplay between religious, cultural, and political forces, drawing on Michael Gauvreau's The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970 and Geneviève Zubrzycki's "Aesthetic Revolt and the Remaking of National Identity in Quebec, 1960-1969". The tension between the Catholic Church's historical influence and the reformist movement's push towards secularization. Lecchino discusses how the Quiet Revolution led to a re-evaluation of traditional norms, starting form within the familial unit and marital conventions to the wider changes that came about from paradigm shifts like that of the second Vatican. The essay explores symbolic acts of iconoclasm, such as the beheading of a statue of St. John the Baptist during a public celebration, as pivotal moments in Quebec's journey towards secularization. Through historical analysis and sociological perspectives, Lecchino argues that while Quebec aimed to distance itself from its Catholic past,

the process was fraught with complexities and contradictions, ultimately resulting in an aesthetic secularism that struggled to accommodate diverse religious expressions. Lecchino concludes by consolidating that the socio-cultural spheres of Quebec's Catholicism would stand in for Quebec's lack of material culture or artistic movements, becoming a homogenous entity within Quebec's self image; exempt from the scrutiny of secular modernity.

Reid B. Locklin (*St. Michael's College, University of Toronto*) *Response by the author*

Jeffrey D. Long (*Elizabethtown College*) Friendly Amendments? Perspectives of a Ramakrishna Mission Theologian

Long will offer an overview of the argument of *Hindu Mission, Christian Mission* and a response from the point of view of constructive Hindu theology. Though the monograph is the work of a Catholic comparativist, aimed primarily at a critical reformulation of Christian missiology, Locklin nevertheless concedes that his account of the selected Advaita mission movements itself represents a "constructive intervention" in those same traditions. He takes this a step further at several points in the work, suggesting various ways that the implicit Advaita theologies he discusses might be made more explicit, for the benefit of these traditions. For Locklin, it seems, Hindu missiology will develop most fruitfully through a process of creative re-traditioning, with primary reference to classical Advaita Vedānta texts. However, in actual practice, leading theologians in the Ramakrishna movement have taken a more hybrid, experiential and pluralist approach. Long will highlight several such theological contributions from Ramakrishna theologians, including his own work, as a benchmark and contrast to the constructive portrait of Advaita missiology advanced in *Hindu Mission, Christian Mission*. The monograph remains helpful to advancing such work, to be sure, but it does so more by provoking reflection than by settling any particular question of theological interpretation.

Amelia Madueño (*York University*) Chanting to the Flooded City: Soka Gakkai International, Hurricane Katrina, and Collective Memory

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina —a category five Atlantic hurricane— landed in New Orleans and flooded 80% of the city, destroying most of its transportation facilities and communications systems. Hurricane Katrina destroyed countless religious buildings; local members of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), Japan's largest new religious movement, wondered if their centre had survived the storm. The Soka Gakkai International-USA New Orleans Buddhist Center did, in fact, escape substantial damage. Nevertheless, many of the organization's members lost their homes, vehicles, and businesses. While some members chose to stay and rebuild, others left New Orleans and never returned. In this paper, four SGI-New Orleans members share their memories of Hurricane Katrina. Based on oral history interviews and ethnographic work, this paper focuses on SGI-New Orleans' collective memory of Hurricane Katrina, which is distinctly marked by members' reliance on Ikeda's teachings. This paper argues that rather than seeking comfort in Nichiren Daishonin's original work, members used Daisaku Ikeda's interpretation of it to overcome the emotional devastation left behind by Hurricane Katrina. In doing so, SGI-New Orleans members actively contribute to the organization's shift from a Nichiren-based movement to an Ikeda-centric one. Additionally, this case study addresses the role of collective memory within Japanese new religious movements involved in distinct environmental, political, and social crises.

Ananda Majumdar (*Vancouver Island University*) Existence Of Religion And Natural Disaster: A Biblical Concept

The Chapter examines how disaster has led to the reflection within Christian Theology and other religious traditions. However, the focus will be on biblical accounts of disasters, the role of God in them, and the analysis of how believers respond to those natural crimes. The paper examined accounts where God has been stated to have sent disasters as a judgment for the sins of human beings. The broad overviews of the theological position have been discussed as the logic behind the connection between religion and disaster. Then, the contemporary and historical claims have also been focused on as another account of the chapter over the judgement that disaster is a punishment by God for human sin. The chapter will also focus on why God allows evil and suffering that could include disasters. Some sins will be critiqued in the context of popular reaction to disasters.

In contrast, the biblical calls for response must go further and include help for those impacted by disasters. A discussion about empathy will be focused on those hurt and working to overcome injustice when it has been a contributing factor. The perspective of this chapter also analyses that God works with those believers to bring good out of lousy staycation. Finally, the chaplain also discussed how theological reflections can get the theme of hope amid disasters.

Janna Martin (*University of Guelph*) and **Sarina Simmons** (*University of Toronto*) Being Mennonite on the Haldimand Tract: Practicing an "Ethics of Incommensurability" from Treaty Land

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This paper is a methodological reflection of how we seek to be treaty people in our scholarship, given the history of Mennonites on the Haldimand Tract. This land of almost one million acres in southwestern Ontario has been home to Indigenous peoples for centuries, including the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee, and was promised to the Six Nations "for ever." Indigenous nations have entered into previous treaty relationships with settlers on this land, namely the Two Row and Dish With One Spoon wampums. Mennonites from Pennsylvania were some of these first settlers on the Haldimand Tract, and brought with them practices of anabaptism, non-resistance, and distinct agricultural customs. Many different Mennonite communities arrived in the ensuing years and continued settling across the territory. Today, only 5.5 percent of the original tract remains in Six Nations possession. Mennonite religious beliefs and practices shaped their community building and agricultural practices, which in many ways have reinforced settler-colonial logic to this day.

By exploring the relationship between Mennonite religion and settler colonialism historically, we suggest how to address complicity in settler-colonialism as scholars of Mennonite heritage working in Mennonite communities. We build on Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang's notion of an "ethics of incommensurability" to demonstrate that ongoing treaty relationships provide a way to practice scholarship that is counter to settler-colonialism. We practice this ethic by engaging with the work of Indigenous scholars on the Haldimand Tract and by honestly considering the ways that Christianity has impacted our approach to place-based scholarship.

Rachel Fell McDermott (*Barnard College*) Kali in a Time of Hurt Sentiment

Abstract TBA

Susan McElcheran (*University of Toronto*) Disability Theory's Critique of Rational Autonomy: Global Effects of Human Personhood and the Imago Dei

In this paper I use the resources of disability theory to question the centrality of rational autonomy to the ideal of human personhood. Rationality has long been a criterion for the image of God that defines the Christian view of human personhood. Linked with the eighteenth-century secular focus on autonomy and individual rational agency as essential to human personhood, the ideal of rational autonomy has shaped humanity's isolation from the rest of creation. This isolation has caused mistreatment of the earth as well as social injustice toward those human groups deemed to be less rational or autonomous, such as those with disabilities. Disability theorists have a unique perspective on the ideal of rational autonomy and the role it plays in human relationships. In this paper I present evidence from disability theorists like Tobin Siebers showing that disability theory, due to the position of disability outside the norm, provides a critical perspective on ideologies underpinning social injustice and can illuminate effects of these ideologies on all human relationships, not just those involving people with disabilities. I combine this with evidence from theorists of intellectual disability who challenge the role of rational autonomy as a criterion for human personhood and the imago Dei. I take this argument further by claiming in this paper that disability theory has resources to critique the ideologies of autonomy and unlimited growth that threaten not only intra-human relationships but also our relationship to the planet.

Brett McLaughlin SJ (*Boston College*) Laudate Deum and the Demise of the Technocratic Paradigm: Pope Francis' Call for Situated Anthropocentrism

The new apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis renews the castigation of the technocratic attitude, that has calamitously become pervasive in the twenty-first century. Environmental decay has hastened due to individuals supposing "as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such." Human beings have deluded and fooled themselves into presuming that growth is unlimited and may continue indefinitely. Some are duped into considering the human as a being with no limits. The agendas of the "magnificent seven" technology companies have gained prominence and hopes over and against even the most sacrosanct accounts of the created world. Efforts to preserve the glory of nature have lost luster.

The technocratic paradigm accents the power of the human subject to such a degree, all non-human participants are rendered disposable. Rare metals have become a sought and guarded commodity to augment the capacities of the human, estranged from their original source as divine gift. Laudate Deum underscores, "Nor can we claim that nature is a mere 'setting' in which we develop our lives and our projects." Human beings arise and persist within fields of interrelationships, among other species of animals and plants. The very notion of human power and potency must undergo an about-turn.

This presentation will argue a situated anthropocentrism as the vantage point for right relationship between human beings and their natural surroundings. Pope Francis scolds that human life is incoherent and untenable without other beings. Jesus himself evidences a tenderness for the non-human creatures that he encounters. Jesus beckoned his disciples to discover the wonder, beauty, and awe in the world fashioned by God. Recognition of the goodness of creation necessitates a respect for the interrelationships and equilibration in the ecosystems in which one exists.

Audrey Miatello (*University of Toronto*) Reconnecting to Nature in the 21st Century: Considering Laudato Si' as a Guide

This paper aims to explore a severe (but often overlooked) consequence of the ecological crisis — humanity's disconnection from nature. The first section of this essay considers some possible roots of this issue, such as urbanization and technology, as well as the harmful implications of this disconnection upon human health and happiness.

In the second section, I propose that we look for a solution outside of science and technology. Following in the footsteps of Lynn White Jr., a historian who once famously said, "the remedy [to the climate crisis] must … be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not," this essay explores the possibility of such a religious remedy. Specifically, I consider how we might use Pope Francis' 2015 papal encyclical, Laudato Si', as the basis for our reconnection to nature.

This paper does not just endeavor to explore the human-nature relationship with words, though, as nature is rarely captured fully and comprehensively in this way. As such, two photo essays are integrated into this paper. The first aims to capture how the disconnected individual relates to the world around them. The second, which concludes this essay, expresses the enchantment and wonder that a newly reconnected individual will find in nature.

James Nowak (*University of Toronto*) "Affective perception" as a means for overcoming the anthropocentric construction of nature in modernity in the poetics of Archibald Lampman and Gerard Manley Hopkins

In A Secular Age (2007), Charles Taylor famously coined the term 'the buffered self' to characterize, among other aspects of the modern self, a perceptual disposition that is divorced from emotional affect and 'buffered' against transcendent experience. This paper explores the work of two nineteenth-century poets – the Canadian Confederation poet Archibald Lampman and the Victorian Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins – to show how they tried to overcome the confines of 'the buffered self' by cultivating perceptual dispositions toward the natural world which married their visual and auditory sensory perceptions to their emotional affect. It argues that their poems and their personal letters show how they employed what I term 'affective perception' to challenge the anthropocentric worldviews to which they were heir, and to experience God's transcendent presence in the natural world. Though writing more than a century before Taylor, both poets characterize their 'affective perception' as a means to overcoming interior and societal boundaries which separated them from nature, and from God. I conclude that Hopkins and Lampman serve as two examples of how, in a time of exponential technological and cultural change, their 'affective perception' was useful for overcoming the anthropocentric and secular-materialist construction of nature.

Mona Oraby (*Howard University*) Sealed in the Skin and on Paper: The Materiality of Communal Belonging in Egypt

This paper considers the meaning and materiality of belonging in contemporary Egypt, focusing on two significant practices: ritual scarification among Orthodox Copts and the invocation of the Islamic order of revelation in administrative legal discourse. Drawing on field research conducted in Upper and Lower Egypt and the analysis of wide-ranging bureaucratic documents and judicial verdicts, I track the confluence of state and communal norms around group membership. I find that even as the religious lives of Copts and Muslims are expressed in distinct and separate spheres, patrilineal descent is valued across lines of religious difference, throwing new light on why the state's religion-based civil status regime, which likewise memorializes membership according to the circumstances of one's birth, endures. What it means to be a Copt and a Muslim today is tied up with membership in a political community. And what it means to be an Egyptian today is tied up with membership in a community of faith. Non-affiliation with a religious group, or seeking to migrate out of the religious group to which one is born, risks exclusion from both.

Rev. Orresta James Paddock (*Cherry Hill Seminary*) Divine Destruction: Syncretized Expression of the Hellenic Gods and Natural Disasters

Ancient Greece experienced a handful of natural disasters during its time, such as the Helike catastrophe, or the plague described in Homer's "Iliad." Antiquity saw disasters and explained them as divine punishment of the gods, attributing various disasters to different divine presences: Earthquakes to Poseidon, storms to Zeus, volcanoes to Hephaestus, plagues to Apollo, and so on. Attributing these phenomena to the gods gave ancient peoples an understanding of the cause and nature of disasters that were otherwise unexplainable at the time. The personification of disasters extends to the modern setting, wherein we see storms such as hurricanes and tropical depressions being given names in order to better track information across storms which may be happening concurrently.

By placing responsibility for these disasters upon certain divine figures, the people of antiquity were able to offer spiritual retribution to the correct god for forgiveness. They gave themselves answers by placing blame on the gods, and therefore giving themselves a way to seek forgiveness for their divine punishment. Had a city garnered so much miasma or even miasma that a god must punish the entirety of a people? This is seen even in modern settings, as many spiritualists have seen the COVID-19 pandemic as a godly response to the mistreatment of the natural and earthly realms. This paper seeks to understand the syncretic nature of disasters to the divine entities of the Hellenic pantheon in order to better understand the innate human reaction to these events, and how spiritual response to these events can best be handled by spiritual leaders to nurture, heal, and serve their communities through disaster and crisis

Aneri Patel (*University of Toronto*) Beyond Rituals: Climate Change Impacts on Sacred Waters and Conservation Strategies

This study examines the impact of climate change on the sacred waters of River Mandakini, a pilgrimage site in Northern India. It investigates changes in water flow patterns, pollution levels, and habitat degradation induced by climate change. Drawing from Hindu religious texts, rituals, and beliefs, it explores conservation strategies to preserve the religious significance of pilgrimage practices and the sanctity of the river. Additionally, it analyzes how insanitary water affects pilgrimage and sacred water bathing rituals, and whether it potentially undermines their religious aspect.

The research incorporates pre-existing work from scholars like Agehananda Bharati and Diana Eck, providing a structure for understanding the relationship between religion, culture, and the environment in South Asia. It advocates for integrating religious teachings into conservation efforts, highlighting the adaptive capacity of religious communities in addressing environmental challenges. In order to foster sustainable interactions with sacred natural sites, interdisciplinary approaches are promoted in this study.

It also emphasizes collaborative initiatives to address the impact of climate change on pilgrimage practices and sacred water bodies, stressing the importance of preserving the religious sanctity and environmental integrity of these sites. It seeks to emphasize the interconnectedness of faith, culture, and environmental stewardship by advocating the integration of religious principles into conservation strategies. Additionally, this study provides practical implications for policymakers, conservationists, and religious leaders, stressing the importance of holistic approaches in mitigating environmental degradation while maintaining the spiritual significance of sacred natural sites.

Sarang Patel (*University of Toronto*) Dissolving a Department: Strife, Finances, and Immigration

I draw on archival material from the University of Toronto Archives to explore the various historical contingencies underlying the dissolution of the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies (1971-1978). Rather than isolating causal factors or engaging in another such explanatory enterprise, I attempt to bring into focus the multifaceted context in which the department was dissolved. I narrow my focus mainly to the epistolary medium, letters between the department chair and university administrators, for example, and reflect on what the resulting story is to suggest about the nature of a university department: what, in other words, does focusing on the dissolution of a department tell us about the nature of its formation and existence?

Katarina Pejovic (*University of Toronto*) Balkan Weathermakers, Folk Magic, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Across the Balkans, the motif of the caul-born weathermaker is an enduring one, with linguistic and folkloric cognates found throughout the peninsula, and especially within Croatia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their parallels to the Northern Italian benandanti—similarly born in the caul, capable of leaving the body in spirit form to fight the demons of ill weather, clash with witches as well as others of their kin, and risk returning from involuntary flight injured or dead—have been much observed by scholars of Southern and South-Eastern European folklore and folk practices. Positioned as both allies of the saints and angels—and thereby on the side of religious

orthodoxy—as well as anti-witches and protectors against malefic magic, these individuals stake out an important liminal space which disquiets traditional conceptions of the magico-religious divide.

This paper will draw upon Serbo-Croatian ethnological scholarship of the zduhać, vetrovnjak, oblačar, gradobranitelj, and krsnik (as well as their many other cognates) to argue how the traditions of these specialists preserve a kind of folk, oral Traditional Ecological Knowledge of seasonal harvest cycles and fertility. Using the image of the caul-born weathermaker as a framing device, this paper will consider how the skills and duties of this central figure in Balkan village life preserve generational ecological wisdom in dealing with disease, climate change, and agricultural fertility, and argue for the continued investigation of Balkan folk magic and ritual specialists as sources of European TEK.

Miray Philips (*University of Toronto*) Coptic Diaspora Mobilization and Generational Divides

Recent scholarship on Egyptian diaspora mobilization towards homeland concerns often ignores ethno-religious minority actors and their claims. Yet minority communities have a stake in both national and group interests, where, at times, these interests may compete. Even further, the literature on diaspora mobilization has minimally attended to generational divides and their implications for fragmented mobilization. Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork on Coptic-Egyptian advocacy in Washington, DC, I ask how generational divides between older diasporic activists and younger American-born Copts have resulted in fragmented mobilization in the United States. I specifically attend to the discursive battle around framing the role of Islam and Muslims in the homeland in a context where Islamophobia is rampant in the hostland. Generational fissures around how to define the "Coptic question" not only has consequences for Coptic mobilization and collective memory, but also has implications for coalition building with other Christian and Egyptian diaspora advocates in Washington, DC.

Martin Pinckney (*University of Toronto*) The Success of Jewish Philosophy at the University of Toronto

Today the University of Toronto (the U of T) hosts a number of scholars of Jewish philosophy. For many outside the university, this strength has become almost synonymous with the legacy of Emil Fackenheim. However, as this paper demonstrates, Fackenheim's initiative, while certainly playing a pivotal role in laying the foundations for Jewish studies, actually had little to do with the current composition and strength of that discipline at the U of T. The story of how Toronto became a landing place for leading scholars of Judaism, and, in particular, Jewish philosophy, is much more complex, interesting, and accidental than one man's legacy. It touches on many of the historical developments and debates in the field of religious studies of the previous century: etic vs. emic perspectives, positive vs. normative approaches, philology vs. philosophy. This paper draws upon faculty interviews, institutional histories, and departmental data in order to tell part of that story. It highlights some of the historical obstacles preventing the initial success of Jewish philosophy at the U of T: anti-semitism, Christian dominance of the university's structure and curriculum, and a lack of financial support for Jewish studies. Turning to the cultural and institutional developments which reversed those obstacles, I argue that the implications of these developments may help us to ask old questions in a new light of possibility: whither philosophy in religious studies? For whom are we writing and thinking, and to what end?

Bianca Quilliam (*University of Toronto*) Observing Kenosis in the Poetry of Hadewijch and John Donne

Kenosis is a term holding significant theological weight. Its greatest influence is on the Christian believer, as it is the means by which one can become more Christlike. This process of becoming like Jesus is complex and often difficult to comprehend. In this essay, I will analyze the kenotic journeys of two famous poet mystics, Hadewijch and John Donne, through an analysis of their poetry. I will begin by asking questions of kenosis: what it is, how it has come to be understood, and its influence on the Christian believer. Then, I will analyze Hadewijch's writing for its kenotic traces, arguing that she most strongly exemplifies her desire to be Christlike through mirroring the Medieval courtly love motif in her poetry. Lastly, I will observe Donne's corporeal poetry for its interiority and physicality as well as its dependence on Song of Songs, a book well-known for its influence on Christian Mysticism. Ultimately, I will conclude that, although their writing has different tones and may target different audiences due to the many years between their authorship, their underlying expressions of kenosis and desire to express a passionate, whole-hearted longing to be more like Christ and in union with the Divine, prevail.

Carolyn Ramzy (*Carleton University*) Coptic Digital Diasporas and Re-Claiming Coptic Narratives Offline

Starting in 2020 and following George Floyd's murder in the United States, a flurry of Coptic-run Instagram accounts emerged to mirror wider critical conversations around social justice, institutional discrimination, and progressive politics

in North America, challenging the Orthodox Church's sole authority on Coptic diaspora identities. In some cases, online users such as Coptic women and queer Copts even bypass the Church completely by curating private services online, often singing around liturgical exclusions they experience "in-real-life" (IRL). In this study, I examine the role of these outlier Coptic online. I ask: How are Coptic digital diasporas and the texts they produce online tell a different story about North American Coptic selfhood and soundscapes? What is the "call and response" between these online conversations and real-life engagement among Coptic diaspora youth, the Church, and their shared music-culture of liturgy, hymns, and spiritual songs? And what can these outlier accounts teach us about decentering and decolonizing our methodologies to tell stories of contested and diasporic Copticities? Drawing on hybrid ethnography and collaborative Indigenist methodologies (Absolon 2022), I illustrate how these Coptic digital diasporas not only embody anti-colonialist methodologies, but also allow Copts to re-search, co-tell, and co-remember their own stories on and offline, as well as in and outside of the Coptic Church.

Ilona Rashkow (*Stony Brook University*) Looking Through the Window: For Better or for Worse

"Looking through the window" is a recurrent motif in literature and art from antiquity to the present. On one hand, the window allows (and sometimes invites) outsiders or viewers to intrude into the private space of someone else and satisfy their curiosity or even prurient interest. On the other hand, it allows someone cloistered inside to look out to see the real world, to become enlightened. Thus, "looking through the window" and can a have positive effect ("for better") or a negative effect ("for worse"). This paper discusses how both of these treatments are at play in biblical literature. Although the "looking through the window" motif has a stark male-female dichotomy, when used more broadly, both male and female characters such as Abimelech, Rahab, Sisera's mother, Michal, and Jezebel make active use of windows positively. Regardless of gender, these biblical characters were "looking through the window", for better or for worse.

Ilona Rashkow (*Stony Brook University*) The Daughters of Zelophehad: Biblical Women's Rights Activists (?)

Some scholars have looked to the daughters of Zelophehad as "proto-feminists", the first women to take an active role in suing for women's rights. It might have been assumed that inheritance rights for women, like so many other legal principles, were part of what many scholars refer to as "oral legal tradition." But they were not.

The easier path for the daughters would have been to shy away from confrontation; they could have seen themselves as collateral damage, victims of Torah's patriarchal claim and their parents' inability to have sons, but a sense of injustice enabled them to confront both Divine and human leadership. While God could have limited judgment to these plaintiffs, God recognized that equality before the law and true justice are "on trial." God's decision inspires hope for a better future, not only for the daughters but for all women (and men!) who will come after them and find themselves in the same position.

Joy Saade (*University of Toronto*) Policing Lebanese-Christian Purity – Predispositions of Maronite cultural hegemony during the COVID19 pandemic

This paper explores sentiments of national and religious being and brings into question the subtle traditions of "othering" seen within practices of policing national and religious character by Lebanese Maronite Christians. The foundation of this paper is structured on ethnographic findings collected during the COVID19 pandemic in Lebanon, in the year 2020, with specific attention to the fervor that resulted from stories of the miraculous healing of COVID19 cases by the holy dirt of the Lebanese saint, Mar Charbel. The reactions and behavior that emerged following the popularization of this modern-day miracle story brings forth questions pertaining to the limitations of modernity in times of crisis. However, responses to the COVID19 pandemic, and the social limitations pertaining to who may access and benefit from the holy miracles of Mar Charbel, allude to the relationship between land and nation, as well as religion and healing. Soil is conceptualized as an integral characteristic of the biological and social bond of the Lebanese Christian people to the land, which can be understood through dichotomies of purity and impurity, religion and reason, and tolerance and intolerance. In reflection of these oppositions, this paper's aim is to argue against the principles of social exclusion embedded within the national fabric of Lebanon, as a condition of self-proclaimed Maronite cultural supremacy of the Lebanese nation.

Swamini Sagar (*University of Toronto*) Interpreting Sacred Texts: A Reader-Response Analysis of The Bhagavad Gita

In my paper, I argue that since a single sacred text can generate multiple interpretations under one context, this suggests that we must focus on a reader's experience with a text, rather than the text itself, in forming its meaning. Sacred texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita, are understood differently among readers. While some understand the Gita to be a strictly religious text that preaches surrendering to God, others deem it allegorical and consisting of more general and agnostic lessons on morality. During the Indian independence movement, the Gita was also widely employed as a political tool in advocating for either non-violent or violent resistance. By constraining ourselves to one strict interpretation, we assume that texts already possess an inherent meaning, before a reader's interaction with it. Certain literary theories, such as reader-response criticism, however, direct focus away from the author, and instead, argue that the reader's experience of the text primarily forms its meaning. This understanding allows multiple interpretations of the text to co-exist. In my paper, I apply the reader-response theory to explain Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi's contrary interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita. Both figures exist within a similar historical framework of Indian colonialism in the 20th century. According to Tilak, however, the Gita calls for physical action, while Gandhi identifies the text as a spiritual guide, teaching the futility of violence. Their varied yet valid interpretations suggest that to determine the meaning and ethics of sacred texts like the Bhagavad Gita, instead of searching for one strict textual meaning, we must consider the readers' interpretations of the text given their context subjectivity.

AmirAbbas Salehi (*McMaster University*) Captain Ahab and Possession: A Hegelian Treatment

Building upon Hegel's examination of the concepts of 'desire,' 'recognition,' and 'self-certainty' in the fourth chapter of Phenomenology of Spirit, subsequently leading to the renowned Master and Slave section, this paper endeavors to establish a philosophical framework for key themes in Herman Melville's Moby-Dick. Melville's monumental work has attracted numerous interpretations, particularly from biblical, political, and philosophical perspectives. Specifically, this paper aims to present a tentative Hegelian approach to comprehending Captain Ahab's desire to capture the White Whale, focusing on the chapters 'Doubloon' and 'Fast-Fish Loose-Fish' of the book. In other words, the analysis centers on the 'desire' to be 'recognized' through 'possessing' Moby-Dick. 'To possess,' in this context, denotes appropriation, which, according to Hegel's exploration of the dialectical movement of the Spirit in achieving self-certainty, results in the annihilation of the desired 'object.' The catastrophic fate of the ship (state) aligns well with this proposed framework, as, per Hegel, one-sided recognition through desire culminates in no recognition at all. The Pequod ship of Captain Ahab serves as a poignant illustration of the self-centeredness enveloping 'civil society,' where 'individuality' is not harmonized with 'universality,' leading to the collapse and negation of civil society.

Sarah Korang Sansa (*Protestant Theological University*) Ghana's Ecological Crisis, the Akan Chief, and the Christian Viceroy Rule: A Ghanaian Ecotheological Exploration

Considering Ghana's ecological crisis, the question that Ghanaian theologians contend with is on how to reinstate the Christian biblical stewardship mandate to enforce care for creation. To join this theological conversation, the paper experimentally investigated this biblical stewardship mandate through the lens of the word 'viceroy' and the religious leadership of the Akan chief of Ghana. It was observed from selected biblical texts (Genesis 1:26, 2:15) that the role of humans in God's creation is characterized by being God-like in act and deed, which could be theologically expressed in the word viceroy. From a close examination, the word viceroy has been once used by a South African Anglican bishop and theologian by name Desmond S. Tutu. In his reflection on the word, he discovered that humans are God's viceroy's because they are biblically expected to be imitators of God's likeness on earth, which includes environmental care. Moreover, this theological understanding of the word viceroy, resonates in the sacred nature of the Akan chief's rule. His role as the intermediary between the royal ancestors and the people he rules, puts him in a dutiful position as one who acts on behalf of the ancestors, in the harmonization of both animate and inanimate things. Therefore, the paper concluded that the contextual meaning of the word viceroy could serve as a model for Ghanaian Christians, in the care for the environment, and most importantly, to champion the course for Christian environmental advocacy in Ghana. The study also, serves as a model for ongoing global environmental concerns. However, this calls for further theological reflections in academic scholarship.

Edward Scrimgeour (*University of Toronto*) Perfunctory and Performative: Reconsidering Criticism of Land Acknowledgments in Canada

Land acknowledgements to open events have quickly become common practice in educational contexts in Canada. The general format involves naming the Indigenous Peoples who have enduring connections to the area and often invokes ideas of gratitude for living and working on the land. As a visible change in public ritual, the land acknowledgment has

also been caught up in anxieties about the substantive limits of Truth and Reconciliation discourse for transformative change within the settler state of Canada.

As a recent arrival from Aotearoa-New Zealand I have been interested by allegations from students that the land acknowledgments within the University of Toronto are "performative." In this paper I will discuss assumptions about sincerity and effective social change that are embedded in this criticism. I will then draw on recent political arguments in New Zealand around the Treaty of Waitangi referendum bill to consider if there is still possibility to mobilize the "trippy" potential of the land acknowledgment (Audra Simpson, 2024 Ato Quayson Lecture).

Mojtaba Shahsavarialavijeh (*University of Toronto*) Skinning The Serpent: Tracing An Esoteric Allegory On The Annihilation Of Self-Hood, According To Najm Al-Din Al-Razi's (D. 654/1256) Sufi Commentary On The Qur'an

This article discusses a comparative analysis of Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Dāyah al-Rāzī's (d. 654/1256) mystical rhetoric regarding the concept of divine authority (walāyah). Al-Rāzī smartly employs parables to express his intellectual system, giving a unique perspective that sets his works apart from those of his predecessors. Notably, al-Rāzī uses some historical parables like the sky, seed, fruit, the bird hatching from the egg, and the tree to elaborate his discourse in walāyah, laying the groundwork for an extensive investigation of specific parables. Al-Rāzī proficiently utilizes the parable of losing a snake's (insalakha) skin (jild) to explain the people of extremity's (ahl-i nahāyah) attitude in the context of walāyah. His explanation highlights the importance of removing a series of veils (ḥijāb), with selfhood (Inānīyat) serving as the most essential veil, drawing parallels with the snake skinning procedure. Furthermore, al-Rāzī asserts the importance of shedding the skin of selfhood through the illumination of divine lights (anwār-i rabbānī) in order to ascend to the extreme station (maqām) of walāyah. This article examines the historical context of this parable, showing its pure usage within the context of walāyah. It seems that this parable had not been used to define the stages of walayah before al-Rāzī. His insightful usage of this parable shows its relevance to the station of the people of extremity in walāyah, considerably expanding the parable and fostering a renewed understanding of this mystical framework.

Yuki Shimada (*Aoyama Gakuin University*) Kotaro Tanaka's Vision for Education Reform in Post-World War II Japan: The Social Application of Catholic Natural Law Theory during a Period of National Crisis

Kotaro Tanaka (1890-1974), a distinguished Japanese scholar/politician/judge, held several significant positions during his lifetime. These included serving as the Dean of the Faculty of Law at the Imperial University of Tokyo, Minister of Education, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and Judge of the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Among his many accomplishments while occupying these roles was his pivotal role in preparing the Basic Act on Education in 1947. The urgent need for reforming the nationalistic/militaristic/imperialistic war-time educational system was brought to light by GHQ, or the US occupation army, after World War II. Education Minister Tanaka spearheaded the development of the Act, which went beyond a mere response to GHQ pressure. Instead, it reflected his Catholic Natural Law worldview. This paper delves into Tanaka's post-war vision for education reform, emphasizing his nuanced understanding of reason, or 'lumen rationis naturalis' in his neo-scholastic/Thomistic lexicon. Tanaka's insights emerge from his writings on topics such as law, politics, and education. He contends that neglecting Natural Law and the undue elevation of secular institutions paved the way for the state and emperor to become absolute entities, with education merely serving as a tool for state mobilization. Furthermore, he argues that education seeks the 'full development of personality,' focusing on each person endowed with reason, and that such democratic education can foster peace. However, he simultaneously recognized the significance of the imperial family in Japan's society, leaving room for nationalists to potentially undermine democratic values.

Colin H. Simonds (*Queen's University*) Nagas in North America: Ecology, Colonialism, and the Limits of Tibetan Buddhist Practice in Diaspora

Despite the global popularity of Tibetan Buddhism in the last century, certain aspects of traditional Tibetan practice have had difficulty migrating into non-Tibetan settings. Indigenous Tibetan Buddhist practice of course involved mantra and meditation, but also included relationships with local deities that were mediated through pūjās and sādhana. Despite the localized nature of these practices, diaspora and convert communities in North America have begun incorporating some of them into their religious communities by inscribing the landscape with Tibetan cosmological elements. In particular, practices concerning water-serpent deities called nāgas (Tib. klu) have begun being adapted to fit the particular landscapes of Tibetan Buddhists in North America. The migration of these localized practices to new environments brings with it questions regarding the potentials and the limitations of adapting place-based religious practices in diaspora communities. This article will begin to explore some of these potentials and limitations through two particular

lenses: ecology and colonialism. It will begin by analyzing several examples of how Tibetan Buddhists in North America are innovating nāga pūjās for their new geographical locales. It will then think through some of the positive ecological consequences of North American nāga pūjās and consider how indigenous Tibetan approaches to sustainability may be migrated alongside these religious practices. Finally, this article will think through the complicated dynamics of a diaspora community populating their new landscape with imported religious deities and consider the neocolonial limitations of nāga practice in its ability to work towards socioecological justice.

Navin Singh (*University of Toronto*) Brahmin, Chamaar, or Madrassi: The Reconstruction of Caste through Hindu Religious Spatialization in Post-Indenture Trinidad and Tobago

There is a common belief among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus that notions of caste were left behind in India and were not sustained within the Hinduism practiced in post-indentureship Trinidad onwards from the 1930s. This paper will argue that this is not entirely the case, that caste has still been perpetuated, albeit in a modified form. Among current Indo-Trinidadian communities caste has indeed survived, though primarily between the most prominent of Brahmin communities and the most peripheral of 'Chamaar' and 'Madrassi' (Tamil-descent) communities. Though some may argue that due to the majority of Hindu marriages in Trinidad being caste-exogamous these stipulations no longer exist, I maintain that caste identity in Trinidad is spatial, occurring on mainly religious grounds. This has led to the formation of distinct religious spaces personalized by and for people of caste-oppressed backgrounds, such as the Trinidadian worship of Sakti amalgamated from the various Goddess worship traditions of the most ostracized of castes. This paper thus argues that despite popular notions, caste is still a relevant issue within the contexts of Hindu religious practice in Trinidad where stipulations of purity and hierarchical superiority were expressed enough for the emergence of a separate space within society dedicated to the socio-religious needs of marginalized peoples of indentured descent.

Micah Streiffer (*McMaster University*) Helping the Rains to Flow: "V'hayah Im Shamoa" and Ecological Responsibility in Reform Judaism

In the twenty-first century, climate change is increasingly central in human life. This centrality expresses itself in religious thought and behaviour. Recent scholarship has shown that, in certain progressive Jewish streams – notably Reconstructionism and Jewish Renewal – ecological responsibility has begun to be understood in religious terms. (This may best be seen in the writings of Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and in certain liturgical works.) It is less clear to what extent this is also true in Reform Judaism, the world's largest liberal Jewish movement, where the emphasis tends to be on social justice.

This paper explores the current understanding of ecological responsibility in Reform Judaism by analyzing recent treatments of the middle paragraph of the Shema (Deuteronomy 11:13-21, known as "V'hayah Im Shamoa" for its opening words). This passage, long part of daily Jewish prayer, constitutes a powerful statement of divine reward and punishment that emphasizes God's granting/withholding of rain in response to human actions. The classical rabbis understood its daily recitation as an act of "accepting the yoke of the commandments." The paragraph was excluded from Reform prayerbooks, for brevity and because its theology was considered repugnant, but has cropped back up in the two most recent Reform liturgies (2007 and 2015), sometimes with an ecological interpretation. In this paper, I analyze the treatment of the paragraph in these prayerbooks, arguing that its evolving understanding reflects an increasing awareness of the climate crisis as a critical issue, and a growing tendency to frame ecological responsibility as a religious imperative.

Chiho Tokita (*University of Toronto*) Materiality of Excess: One Too Many Candles?

My talk explores the theme of excess in the materiality of lived Catholic practices. Beautifully evoked in History and Presence (2016), Robert Orsi writes of "too many candles; too many statues and images; too many rosaries; too much desire, anxiety, and need."

I consider the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Des Plaines, whose side altar is richly layered and ensconced with objects – rosaries, candles, photos of loved ones, and more. As one approach to understanding this purported 'too muchness', I use the notion of accretion as a certain vitality engendered in the phenomena of amassing noted by Peter Van Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero (2011) and Fraenkel (2011) in their studies of spontaneous memorials. Like shrine sites, spontaneous memorials share the vocabulary of everyday materiality and 'too-muchness'. How many candles are one too many and for whom?

Siena von Rosen (*University of Toronto*) Touching God: Immanence and Transcendence in Post-Reformation Poetry of George Herbert and Thomas Traherne

Michelle Voss (*Emmanuel College, University of Victoria*) A Question of Coloniality? Comparative Method and the Politics of Empire

Voss will engage the arguments of *Hindu Mission, Christian Mission* as a comparative theologian and scholar of Hindu-Christian Studies. In the last few years, postcolonial and decolonial critics have drawn attention to the deep imbrication of comparative theology and the politics of empire. Such a critique is particularly relevant to the present work, which takes up issues—mission and conversion—that became a flashpoint in the Indian struggle against the British Raj and that have continued to echo this colonial history right up to the present day. *Hindu Mission, Christian Mission* is written with an awareness of these histories, and Locklin attempts to address them in part by valorizing the efforts of Hindu missionaries (and nationalists) like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Chinmayananda. But is this sufficient? Voss takes up this question, evaluating the monograph through the lens of coloniality and its critics. In particular, the presentation will place *Hindu Mission, Christian Mission* into dialogue with a growing number of comparative theologians, from South Asia and Turtle Island, who have more effectively privileged questions of power and oppression in their interreligious explorations.

The English Reformation transformed worship practices. While various doctrinal adjustments were brought by the Reformation, here attention centres on changes in material religion and worship practices. The rise of iconoclasm brought with it a shift from physical and communal worship practices to private worship through prayer and language. This moved God to an intangible figure out of human reach, setting the stage for Traherne and Herbert's desire to access God. The topic of this paper addresses Traherne and Herbert's exploration of new, tangible connections to God in post-reformation English society. These connections are examined through the usage of apophatic and cataphatic language within their respective works, Traherne's nature worship in Poems of Felicity, and Herbert's divinely saturated material world in The Temple. Through their personal connections to God, Traherne and Herbert use apophasis and cataphasis to emphasize the interrelation of immanence and transcendence instead of their opposition. This paper studies works of Traherne and Herbert, offering a perspective on God's relation to post-Reformation English Christians that acknowledges the loss of traditional physical worship measures yet does not see a tangible connection to God as absent here.

Elliot J. Weidenaar (*Union Theological Seminary*) Queering Christian Cosmology: Reimagining the Trinity, Creation, and the Virgin Mary as sadomasochistic polycule

In Christian theology, the Trinity is often understood to be the center of relationality for the universe. But Christian theology cannot, or pragmatically avoids queer forms of relationality that violate conceptions of hetero-moralist and hetero-normative conceptions of relationality. Within theology, the logical source of queerness, and thus the place of possibility for expanded forms of relationality, is the Virgin Mary. And as the fundamental safety and serenity of queer bodies depend on environmental security, so too does the earth, adamah, come into play. The earth is part and parcel of the divine plan (Genesis 1:28-90), serving as a foil for both the trinity and humanity. In this paper, I will argue that the Trinity, Creation/Adamah, and the Virgin Mary constitute a kind of divine polycule that transgresses understandings of love and relationality from Rome to the present. Moreover, I will argue that the Trinity exists in a sadomasochistic sense of self-love, which, when turned outward, rehearses the dialogue of sin and suffering. Likewise, I will opine that Adamah, infant humanity, and the Theotokos soften the sadomasochistic bent of the Trinity. I will attend to these issues by creating a philosophical system of queer theory (per Foucault, Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, Judith Butler) combined with the theological contributions of queer thinkers such as Mark Jordan, Marcella Althus Reid, Patrick Cheng, and Linn Marie Tonstad.

Kevin J. White (*University of Toronto*) Grief, Adaptability, and the Anthropocene from an Indigenous Perspective

I would like to put into conversation a sense of historicization of the cosmological narratives, (Haudenosaunee). John Mohawk once stated that human kind will adapt and survive the climate changes we are facing. Amber Adams has studied the story of Skywoman—first through a lens of grief within the story and her experiences. There was a talk and an article that suggests the cosmological narrative may in fact be a roadmap or blueprint to recover from ecological disaster—or climate change.

I want to put into conversation these two perspectives, with work that I have done on the Anthropocene from an indigenous lens and the importance of the Thanksgiving Address as a reminder of the Creation story—an instruction to human beings, and a value system—that allows for adaptation via Mohawk, but connects Adams blueprint for ecological disaster and recovery using the Good Mind.

Richard Wu (*University of Toronto*) and **Zuha Tanweer** (*University of Toronto*) The Marginalization of Indigenous Knowledges about Forests in Democratizing India

Since the 1980s, forest management in India has been undergoing a democratizing transition from a state-centered scientific forestry framework to a joint participatory framework in which various stakeholders join efforts at conserving and restoring forests. One might expect that the democratization would imply that knowledges about forests would be liberated from the dominance of a rational-economic view to an embrace of previously sidelined local indigenous understandings. The question remains, however, as to whether this democratization has indeed foregrounded such indigenous knowledges. I argue that an implicitly caste-based marginalization of indigenous knowledges – knowledges embodied, e.g., in single-caste Ambalakkarar and Muttaraiyar villages in Tamil Nadu - about forests persists even under the democratization. My argument will be based on an examination of the role of environmental NGOs in the production and education of knowledge about the so-called "sacred groves" - small patches of forests which are ascribed sacred value and maintained by local communities - in India. By examining the work of two particular NGOs that worked with different indigenous communities in Tamil Nadu, I will show how the ideologies of these NGOs, through a logic of difference and a logic of assimilation, marginalized the indigenous epistemic frameworks.

Albert Y. Yang (*University of Toronto*) A Journey of Growth and Transformation: a digital humanities research project on the course syllabi of RLG1000Y from 1976-2024

RLG1000Y, Method and Theory in the Study of Religion, has been the core course of the doctoral program of the Department for the Study of Religion (DSR) since 1976 when it was first offered at the Centre for Religious Studies, the forerunner of the DSR. Although the purpose of the course has remained unchanged, which is to provide first-year doctoral students with a general understanding of the study of religion, over the last five decades, foundational themes and the pedagogy of the course have undergone transformation reflecting the overall development of the field in response to decolonization, the rise of Indigenous, Feminist and Queer studies and more. Each course syllabus is a time-capsuled epistemological imaging of instructors' engagement with some of the theoretical and methodological debates and discussions during a specific phase of the development of the study of religion. The paper provides a multi-perspective analysis of almost fifty syllabi of the REL1000 and RLG1000Y from 1976 to 2024, enhanced by rich visualization of relevant data. It also reveals for the first time, background information about the long and arduous process of the establishment of the Centre for Religious Studies. The paper also shares insight on constructing an extensive relational database from archived course syllabi and the Academic Calendars of the School of Graduate Studies (SGS), retrieved from the U of T Archives and Records Management Services (UTARMS).

Mariam Youssef (*California State University, Long Beach*) Redemption and Resurrection: Coptic Funeral Rites and Gendered Theologies of the Body

This paper explores the gender dynamics of Coptic Orthodox funeral rites and their impact among living Copts. Language and imagery of death pervades Coptic church life, incorporated into music, teaching, ritual, and art. This fixation on death also communicates theologies of gender and sexuality that bleed into the world of the living. Coptic funerals employ different prayers and scriptural references depending on the gender, age, and leadership status of the deceased. I argue that funeral rites for Coptic men are structured to draw attention to the resurrection of the body, while funeral rites for Coptic women are structured to emphasize the redemption of the body, thus reinforcing the notion that women's bodies are in need of redemption.