



**2025 PNW American Academy of Religion
Regional Conference
Gonzaga University
Spokane, WA
May 23-24, 2025**

2025 PNW AAR Regional Conference Program Schedule

FRIDAY AFTERNOON, MAY 23, 2025

First Session (2:00 PM-5:00 PM) Jepson 103

Hebrew Bible

Joshua and Leviticus

Link: <https://plu-edu.zoom.us/j/99695787345>

Presider: Moshe Rachmuth, Portland State University, rachmuth@pdx.edu

4:30-5:00 Ehud Ben Zvi, Prof. Emeritus University of Alberta, ehudbenzvi@ualberta.ca

“What does “Samuel the Prophet” have to do with Josiah?” VIRTUAL

First Session (2:00 PM-5:00 PM) Jepson 104

Teaching Religion

<https://gonzaga.zoom.us/j/97124057752>

Presider: Scott Starbuck, Gonzaga University, starbuck@gonzaga.edu

2:00-2:30 John Sheveland, Gonzaga University, sheveland@gonzaga.edu, “Overwhelmed and Under Water: Teaching religion and violence for resilience at a Catholic University”

2:30-3:00 Beth Barsotti, Gonzaga University, bbarsotti@gmail.com, “Formative Education: Contributing to the Process of Becoming”

3:00-3:30 Lauryn Stanfield, George Fox University, lstanfield22@georgefox.edu, “The Successes and Shortcomings of Religious Education: A Student’s Perspective”

3:30-4:00 **BREAK**

4:00-4:30 Glen Fairen, Oklahoma State University, glen.j.fairen@okstate.edu, “The Devil Went Down to Oklahoma: Teaching Introduction to World Religion in the Bible Belt with The Satanic Temple.”

4:30-5:00 Scott Starbuck, Gonzaga University, starbuck@gonzaga.edu, "Pedagogy of Israelite Temples: Promises and Pitfalls of Using Virtual Reality"

First Session (2:00 PM-5:00 PM) Jepson 109

Theology and Philosophy of Religion

Link: <https://meet.google.com/swa-aoww-qrj>

Presider: Norman Metzler, Concordia University, npjmetzler@outlook.com

2:00-2:20 Tyler Tritten, Gonzaga University, tritten@gonzaga.edu, "Anne Conway on Middle Nature"

2:20-2:40 Joseph Mudd, Gonzaga University, mudd@gonzaga.edu, "The Analogy of Friendship: Moving Beyond Spousal Analogies in Catholic Theology"

2:40-3:00 Chandler Rogers, Gonzaga University, rogersc2@gonzaga.edu, "The Diremption of Identity into Difference: Intellectualism and Voluntarism in Schelling's Philosophie und Religion"

3:00-3:20 Finney Premkumar, University of Birmingham, finney.p@hotmail.com, "The Technological Singularity: Should We Redefine Religious Views of Human Uniqueness in the Context of Artificial General Intelligence?"

3:30-4:00 **BREAK** *but remember the Welcome Reception with libations is just an hour away...*

4:00-4:20 Gilad Elbom, Oregon State University, gilad.elbom@gmail.com "From Inner Conflict to Divine Growth: Introducing Defragmentation Theology" VIRTUAL

4:20-4:40 Chris Morrissey, Trinity Western University, Chris.Morrissey@twu.ca "Aquinas on the Impossibility of Self-Movers and of Infinite Regresses of Merely Secondary Causes" VIRTUAL

First Session (2:00 PM-5:00 PM) Jepson 111

Religion and Society

Link: <https://ca01web.zoom.us/j/61800737355?pwd=40agColXwibXGfeOmVCs894AW1gJEr.1>

Book Panel: On Christian Nationalism: Critical and Theological Perspectives

Presider: David M. Gides, University of Providence, davidmgides@gmail.com

2:00-2:30 David M. Gides, University of Providence, david.gides@uprovidence.edu, Introduction

- 2:30-3:00** Joan Braune, Gonzaga University, braune@gonzaga.edu, Appropriation of Tradition as Regression and Transgression: Catholic Fascist Movements and U.S. Christian Nationalism
- 3:00-3:30** Lars Stoltzfus, Gonzaga University, stoltzfus@gonzaga.edu; Dr. Joseph Flores, Gonzaga University, floresj@gonzaga.edu; Joint Presentation: From Stitching Seams to Shooting Sinners: A Christian Nationalism Power Couple's Strategic Gendered Rhetoric
- 3:30-4:00** **BREAK**
- 4:00-5:00** Concluding Discussion (all panelists)

Publishing Session Jepson 018

Link: <https://meet.google.com/udw-zscn-otr>

Presider: Lauryn Stanfield, George Fox University, lstanfield22@georgefox.edu

4:00-5:00 All Things Publishing with Linda Bathgate from WSU Press

5:00 - 6:00 **Welcome Reception – The Globe Room at Cataldo Hall**
Co-hosted by Gonzaga University's Catholic Studies, Religious Studies Department, the Office of Inclusive Excellence together with Bobby's Cafe & Catering.

A word to the experienced: Don't let your passionate session chairs keep you late: delicious bites with libations await for all!

6:15 - 7:00 **Keynote Conversation – The Globe Room at Cataldo Hall, Gonzaga University**
"Indigenous Religions and First Nations Native Spirituality"
 Prof. Itohan M. Idumwonyi Interviews Dr. Raymond Reyes

7:00-8:00 **Students Social hour (No-Li Brewhouse: 1003 E Trent Ave)**

Welcome

Prof. Shannon Dunn, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies

Dr. Raymond F. Reyes is a distinguished scholar and leader renowned for his deep commitment to Indigenous communities and cultural diversity. Currently (retired, but not tired) as the Associate Academic Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at Gonzaga University, his extensive career spans over three decades of dedicated service in education, tribal leadership, and community engagement. With profound connections to tribal leaders and Indigenous elders in Ecuador and Peru, Dr. Reyes brings invaluable insights to discussions on "Indigenous Religions and First Nations Native Spirituality." His rich experiences in intercultural competence, human rights, and organizational development, combined with his passionate advocacy for Indigenous rights, uniquely position him to enhance our understanding of Native spiritual traditions. A proud father and active community participant, his lived experience and scholarly work continue to inspire meaningful dialogue and cultural appreciation.

Prof. Itohan M. Idumwonyi is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies specializing in African Religions, Diaspora religions, African Studies, Sociology of Religion, Womanist Theology, and Gender Studies at Gonzaga University. Her ethnographic research offers innovative insights into gender and religion. She has published extensively, including her recent book, "Crashed Realities? Gender Dynamics in Nigerian Pentecostalism" (Brill). With over ten years of teaching and research experience, she has secured substantial research funding. Her Princeton fellowship will support her second book in the upcoming academic year. Committed to fostering an inclusive, challenging, and diverse learning environment, she aligns her teaching with Gonzaga University's values.

SATURDAY MORNING, MAY 24, 2025

Second Session (9 AM-12 PM) Jepson 104

Experimental Exegesis

Link: <https://meet.google.com/udw-zscn-otr>

Genesis, Exodus, and Beyond

Presider: Lauryn Stanfield, George Fox University, Istanfield22@georgefox.edu

9:00-9:30 Lauryn Stanfield, George Fox University, Istanfield22@georgefox.edu, "Patriarchs, Weeping, and Child Sacrifice: The Book of Job in Dialogue with the Binding of Isaac"

9:30-10:00 Kooper Wilson, Portland State University, kooper@pdx.edu, "Deconstructing the Freudian Animal in *Moses and Monotheism*"

10:00-10:30 Christopher S. Morrissey, Trinity Western University, Chris.Morrissey@twu.ca, "Abraham, Isaac, and the Euthyphro Dilemma" VIRTUAL

10:30-11:00 BREAK

Second Session (9 AM-12 PM) Jepson 103

Hebrew Bible

Research Group on Dress

Link: <https://plu-edu.zoom.us/j/99695787345>

Presider: Antonios Finitsis, Pacific Lutheran University, finitsak@plu.edu

9:00-9:30 Moshe Rachmuth, Portland State University, (rachmuth@pdx.edu) "A Headdress Made of Barley: The Drama of Reading Ruth 3:15-18"

9:30-10:00 Selena Billington, Independent Scholar (selena.billington@fitchfamily.org) "A Biblical Example of Sumptuary Law: Aaron Alone Wears: *SHA'ATNEZ*"

10:00-10:30 Christine Palmer, Gordon Conwell, (cpalmer@gcts.edu) "Ensembles of Access: The puzzling Case of Sacral Apparel on the Day of Atonement" VIRTUAL

10:30-11:00 BREAK

11:00-11:30 Allen Hamlin, Trinity College, (Allen.Hamlin.2021@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk) "Untangling the Ambiguity of Identity in Joshua 9: Clothing as Multivalent Connecting Device" VIRTUAL

11:30-12:00 Jennifer Matheny, Baylor University, (jenny_matheny@baylor.edu) "Ruth and Esther as "Sharp Dressed Women" *Dress as a Means for Identity Alteration(s)*"
VIRTUAL

Second Session (9 AM-12 PM) Jepson 111
New Testament and the World of Christianity

Link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/3571010386?pwd=Lk0muG55wwGYhCy8lWjPCGsJalaJrC.1&omn=81563813720>

Presider: Stanley N. Helton, Alberta Bible College, snhelton@abccampus.ca

9:00-9:25 Matt Recla, Boise State University, matthewrecla@boisestate.edu, "Jesus the Suicide"

9:25-9:50 Paul N. Anderson, George Fox University, panderso@georgefox.edu "Jesus and the Way of the Kingdom in Bi-Optic Perspective"

9:50-10:20 David P. Ross, Alberta Bible College, dross16@abccampus.ca, "Awakened from Slumber: Biographical Reconstruction and Hypocrisy in John Calvin's Reception of Paul's Conversion."

10:20-10:45 Ralph Korner, Taylor Seminary of Kairos University, ralph.korner@taylor-edu.ca, "To What or to Whom is Jesus the Way in John 14?" VIRTUAL

10:45-11:10 BREAK

11:10-11:35 Kurt Queller, University of Idaho (emeritus), kqueller@uidaho.edu, "Now, in this age": Afterlife speculation vs. this-worldly prophetic critique in the gospel of Mark. '

11:35-12:00 Daniel Christensen, Fuller Theological Seminary, danielchristensen@fuller.edu, "Give Me This Authority:" Power, Authority, and their Transactional Capabilities in the Book of Acts."

Second Session (9 AM-12 PM) Jepson 109

Theology and Philosophy of Religion

Link: <https://meet.google.com/swa-aoww-qrj>

Presider: Norman Metzler, Concordia University, npjmetzler@outlook.com

9:00-9:20 Colton Kirby, George Fox University, ckirby22@georgefox.edu, "Aquinas's Third Way Against Objections: Why God is a Better Explanation than the Universe or Particles"

- 9:20-9:40** Colin Ludwig, Gonzaga University, ludwig@gonzaga.edu, "The Rejection of Theological Proofs in German Idealism"
- 9:40-10:00** Donghyung Lee, Yale Divinity School, donghyung.lee@yale.edu, "Three Ways to Respond to the Problem of Evil: Adams, Ekstrom, and Kilby" VIRTUAL
- 10:00-10:20** Wayne Pomerleau, Gonzaga University, pomerleau@gonzaga.edu, "Loyalty and Disloyalty in the Context of Virtue and Vice"
- 10:30-11:00** **BREAK**
- 11:00-11:20** Bruce Hiebert, University Canada West, bruce.hiebert@ucanwest.ca, "Deconstructing moral responsibility: A Response to Derrida, Caputo, and Badiou"
- 11:20-11:40** Norman Metzler, Concordia University, npjmetzler@outlook.com, "Original Mortality?"
- 11:40-12:00** Section Business Meeting

Second Session (9 AM-12 PM) Jepson 122

Religion and Society

Link: <https://ca01web.zoom.us/j/61800737355?pwd=40agCoWibXGfeOmVCs894AW1gJEr.1>

Presider: Bruce Hiebert, University Canada West, bruce.hiebert@ucanwest.ca

- 9:20-10:00** Shihwa Hwang-Meza, KU Leuven, shihwa.hwang-meza@kuleuven.be, "God First, You Second, I Third: Theological Responses to Forced Ascription" VIRTUAL
- 10:00-10:30** Joseph Shou-Tao Liang, Regent College, dummyjoe610@hotmail.com, "Everyday Theology: When Taiwanese/Chinese Protestant Immigrant Families Meet Halloween" VIRTUAL
- 10:30-11:00** **BREAK**

Second Session (9 AM-12 PM) Jepson 123

Women and Religion

Women of Spirit and Strength

Link: <https://teams.live.com/meet/93192224248696?p=pAFEqNfMmxtXOZolQh>

Presider: Kristen Daley Mosier, kdaleymosier@pm.me

- 9:30-10:00** Lily An Kim, Asia-Pacific Peace Museum, Dr.LilyKim@gmail.com, "Nursing Bridges for Healing: Canadian-Korean Relations in Indigenous Women's Perspective."
VIRTUAL
- 10:00-10:30** L. Heidenreich, Washington State University, Lheidenr@wsu.edu, "When Faith Met Action: Incarceration and Incarnation at the Fresno County Jail."
- 10:30-11:00** **BREAK**
- 11:00-11:30** Anna Nowland, Independent scholar, anowland@zagmail.gonzaga.edu, "Dorothy Day and Kierkegaard's Stages of Existence: The Modern 'Mother of Faith'."
- 11:30-12:00** Selena Madden, Independent Scholar, selena.madden@gmail.com, "Embodying the Feminine Warrior: Martial Arts, Elemental Forces, and Spirit."

SATURDAY NOON

(Lunch and Regional Business Meeting)

- 12:00** Lunch Provided in Room
- 12:30-1:30** PNW Regional Business Meeting in Room 108

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

First Session (2:00-5:30 PM) Jepson 108

Asian and Comparative Studies

Korean Buddhism, Chinese Presbyterians, Indonesian Religion

Link: <https://vst.zoom.us/j/84501931877?pwd=bYoKdaVHdMplIEdi1hulerlhjA9jj4.1>

- Presenter:** Nick Gier, University of Idaho, ngier006@gmail.com
- 2:00-2:45** Jongmyung Kim, Research fellow at Geumgang University, kim@ggu.ac.kr
"The Suryuk chae Buddhist Ritual in Korea: Exploring Its Philosophical Foundations and Implications"
- 2:45-3:30** Nick Gier, University of Idaho, ngier006@gmail.com, "Traders and Sufis: Moderate Muslims in Medieval and Modern Indonesia"
- 3:30-4:00** **BREAK**

4:00-4:45 Jacqueline Cleland, Oakridge Christian Ministry, Jhc.chJ@hotmail.com "Heart to Art: Artistic Adaptations and Faith Transmission at Oakridge Christian Ministry"
VIRTUAL

4:45-5:30 Nick Gier, University of Idaho, ngier006@gmail.com
Special Slide Presentation: "Waiting for the Queen: Bali's Cremation of the Century"

Third Session (2:00-5:30 PM) Jepson 104
Experimental Exegesis
Link: <https://meet.google.com/udw-zscn-otr>
Cosmological Narratives and Human Identity

Presider: Lauryn Stanfield, George Fox University, Istanfield22@georgefox.edu

2:00-2:30 Matthew Fortin, Independent Scholar, maf2581@g.harvard.edu, "What the Spiritual Practice of Rune Magic in Contemporary Paganism and Western Esoteric Hermeneutics of Kabbalah Can Learn From Each Other"

2:30-3:00 Gilad Elbom, Oregon State University, gilad.elbom@gmail.com, "The Psychological Eschatology of Sefer Yetzirah and Adjacent Kabbalistic Cosmologies" VIRTUAL

3:00-3:30 Connor Mahoney, Gonzaga University, mahoneyc@gonzaga.edu, "The Speculative Significance of Original Sin"

3:30-4:00 **BREAK**

4:00-4:30 Anna Nowland, Independent Scholar, anowland@zagmail.gonzaga.edu, "Paul's Path to Mutual Recognition"

4:30-5:00 Program unit business meeting

Third Session (2:00-5:30 PM) Jepson 103
Hebrew Bible
Poetry Prose and Exegesis
Link: <https://plu-edu.zoom.us/j/99695787345>

Presider: Antonios Finitis, Pacific Lutheran University, finitisak@plu.edu

2:00-2:30 Starbuck, Scott, Gonzaga University, (starbuck@gonzaga.edu) "Performative Dress as the Visual Center of Psalm 45"

- 2:30-3:00** Moshe Rachmuth, Portland State University, (rachmuth@pdx.edu) "She Asked for Nothing other than What Hegai Suggested (Esther 2:15): Clothes as Personhood"
- 3:00-3:30** Randolph Bynum, Northwest Nazarene University, (wrbynum@nnu.edu) "Prophets and Hairy Mantles: When a Negative Becomes a Positive or Is What You Don't Wear as Important as What You Do Wear"
- 3:30-4:00** **BREAK**
- 4:00-4:30** Ron Clark, George Fox University, (rclark@georgefox.edu) "Lessons from Lemuel's Momma: The מְאִיץ הַיָּלָד, Healthy Masculinity, and Guiding Young Men to Spiritual Maturity"
- 4:30-5:00** Abel Sitali, University of Pretoria, (sitali07@gmail.com) "Monotheism and the מְלַאכִים (Messengers) in Chronicles: Tracking Persian influence on Jewish religion." VIRTUAL

Third Session (2:00-5:30 PM) Jepson 109
Theology and Philosophy of Religion
Link: <https://meet.google.com/swa-aoww-grj>

- Presider:** **Norman Metzler, Concordia University, npjmetzler@outlook.com**
- 2:00-2:20** Nicholas Fieseler, Independent Scholar, (nfieseler@gmail.com), "Incarnational Theology Re-Imagined" VIRTUAL
- 2:20-2:40** Anita Ansah, Independent Scholar, (abaansah27@gmail.com), "The Critical Role of Friendship and Song in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Ghana"
- 2:40-3:00** Julie Land, Western Theological Seminary, (julie.land@westernsem.edu), "The Eucharist, Friendship, and John's Gospel"
- 3:00-3:20** Bob Schmidt, Concordia University, (robert.f.schmidt@comcast.net), "The Coming of the Kingdom and Political Change"
- 3:30-4:00** **BREAK**
- 4:00-4:20** Wayne Rangi Nicholson, Māori Anglican Church in Aotearoa (New Zealand), (ranginicholson3@gmail.com), "Māori Theological Perspectives on Treaty Partnership in the Public Square" VIRTUAL

4:20-4:40 Steve Studebaker, Trinity Western University, steve.studebaker@twu.ca, "The Spirit, Salmon, and People: A Theology of Reciprocal Relationality"

Third Session (2:00-5:30 PM) Jepson 122

Religion and Society

Link: <https://ca01web.zoom.us/j/61800737355?pwd=40agColXwibXGfeOmVCs894AW1gJEr.1>

Presider: Bruce Hiebert, University Canada West, bruce.hiebert@ucanwest.ca

2:00-2:30 Justin Davis, Boise State University, justindavisphd@gmail.com, "Prohibiting the Free Exercise of Religion: Discrimination against Orthodox Christianity in Alaska" VIRTUAL

2:30-3:00 Levi Shiach, Regent College, levijshiach@gmail.com, "Rediscovering Recovery: On the Myth of Addictedlessness and the Good News of the Twelve Steps"

3:00-3:30 Jeff Cullen, Foundations for the Future Charter Academy, jcullen@shaw.ca, "Maximus and the Singularity: An Exploration of Maximus the Confessors Theological Anthropology Applied to AI and Agency"

3:30-4:00 **BREAK**

4:00-4:30 Bruce Hiebert, University Canada West, bruce.hiebert@ucanwest.ca, "Using AI Large Language Models to improve ethics: Six options"

4:30-5:00 **Religion & Society Business Meeting**

Third Session (2:30-5:30 PM) Jepson 123

Women and Religion

We Are Not Our Wounds

Link: <https://teams.live.com/meet/93192224248696?p=pAFEqNfMmxtXOZolQh>

Presider: Kristen Daley Mosier, kdaleymosier@pm.me

2:30-3:00 Melissa Porter, Independent scholar, porter.melissanicole@gmail.com, "#MeToo Christology: A Feminist Christology of Wounds and Resistance."

3:00-3:30 Rachel Hanna, Regent College, BC, rhanna@regent-college.edu, "Companions in Darkness: Understanding Thérèse of Lisieux and Mother Teresa from a Trauma Theology Perspective." VIRTUAL

3:30-4:00 **BREAK**

- 4:00-4:30** Emily Larsen, Regent College, BC, emily.larsen13@gmail.com, "Minutes of the Breathing of God's Spirit on Her Heart': The Life, Spirituality, and Suffering of Sarah Pierpont."
- 4:30-5:00** James Smoker, Regent College, BC, jsmoker@regent-college.edu, "Sudden Turns Towards Freedom: Eucatastrophes in Sara Coleridge's Phantasmion."
- 5:00-5:30** **Program Unit Business Meeting**

SATURDAY EVENING

- 6:00-7:00** **Banquet Dinner – The Skyline Ballroom
The Centennial Hotel**
303 West North River Drive Spokane, WA 99201 844-733-3305

*All Conference Registration includes dinner this year – Please join us!
It is a beautiful .7 mile river walk to the hotel along the Spokane River*

If you prefer driving, parking passes can be purchased for a discounted rate on EventBrite for \$6 at dinner (with confirmation of purchase) or \$14 without discounted ticket

- 7:00-8:00** **Presidential Plenary – The Centennial Hotel**
"Religious Studies within the Whirlwind"
Rev. Dr. Scott R. A. Starbuck, Gonzaga University

Rev. Dr. Scott R.A. Starbuck is a distinguished theologian, educator, and pastor based in Spokane, Washington. He serves as a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at Gonzaga University and as the Senior Pastor of Manito Presbyterian Church. Dr. Starbuck earned his Ph.D. in Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies from Princeton Theological Seminary. He began teaching at Gonzaga University in 2002, where he specializes in biblical theology and hermeneutics. His teaching emphasizes theological reflection, spiritual growth, and social justice. In 2017, he received an exemplary faculty award for excellence in teaching.

Ordained in 1990 by the Presbyterian Church (USA), Dr. Starbuck has been serving as the Senior Pastor at Manito Presbyterian Church since 2001. His sermons are known for their integration of Christian scholarship, cultural critique, humor, intellectual rigor, and spiritual depth. Dr. Starbuck is an active scholar with research interests in theology, the Ancient Near East, and the Hebrew Bible. He has published numerous articles and scholarly papers, including works on the Psalms and biblical lament. His monograph, "Court Oracles in the Psalms: The So-Called Royal Psalms in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context," examines the theological contributions of royal psalms to ancient Israel's theological anthropology.

Dr. Starbuck speaks tonight on how religious scholarship continues to be challenged by institutional volatility, environmental upending, and political division and discord. More than

simply the gradual and inevitable winds of change, such challenges emerge from the paradigmatic tumults of postmodernism. In this keynote address, Dr. Starbuck articulates how scholars, community leaders, and the Pacific Northwest American Academy of Religion as an organization might work responsively, effectively, creatively, and responsibly within the current whirlwind.

2025 PNW AAR Student Paper Award Winner

Graduate Student, Donghyung Lee, Yale University,

"Three Ways to Respond to the Problem of Evil: Adams, Ekstrom, and Kilby."

ABSTRACTS

Asian and Comparative Studies

Jongmyung Kim, Research Fellow, Geumgang University, South Korea, kjm@ggu.ac.kr

"The Suryuk chae Buddhist Ritual in Korea: Exploring Its Philosophical Foundations and Implications"

This paper examines the philosophical foundations and implications of the Suryuk chae, a Buddhist ritual in Korea. Rituals, as fundamental aspects of human life, form the core of religious practices. Buddhism, which has evolved into a global religion beyond its origins in India, owes its spread to the diverse rituals that emerged across different regions and historical periods. The significance of Buddhist rituals in understanding East Asian societies is well-established, and since the 1980s, ritual studies have gained prominence as an academic field. However, Buddhist rituals remain a relatively underexplored area of study in global scholarship.

The Suryuk chae ritual was initially conceived as an offering to save wandering spirits and hungry ghosts (known as *preta* in Sanskrit) both underwater and on land. Over time, it also became associated with curing diseases, eventually developing into a uniquely Korean practice. First performed in Korea in the late tenth century, this ritual gained particular prominence during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), a period characterized by pro-Confucian and anti-Buddhist policies. Remarkably, it became the only Buddhist ritual included in the first national legal code, the Six Codes (Yukchŏn). Despite its historical significance, the Suryu chae ritual faced near extinction during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) following the fall of the Chosŏn dynasty. Nevertheless, in modern Korea, it has been revitalized as a national intangible cultural heritage.

Through a hermeneutic analysis of Buddhist scriptures, historical texts, anthologies, and epigraphs—combined with historical and philosophical investigation as well as participant observation—this paper explores the underlying ideologies of the Suryuk chae ritual and their

historical and contemporary implications. These ideologies encompass concepts such as karma, the soul, death, transmigration, compassion, and disease. The findings suggest that the Suryuk chae ritual, rooted in a modified form of Buddhist doctrine and traditional East Asian thought, evolved from a primarily philosophical practice into a political tool, adapting to meet the specific needs and agendas of different historical periods.

Nick Gier, University of Idaho, ngier006@gmail.com

“Traders and Sufis: Moderate Islam in Medieval and Modern Indonesia”

In 2014 I published a book entitled *The Origins of Religious Violence: An Asian Perspective*. I had published two previous books in the SUNY Series on Constructive Postmodernism, and I found this view key to analyzing religiously motivated violence in Asia. As a counter to Derridean postmodern destruction, constructive postmodernism attempts to reintegrate the values of premodern and modern forms of thought. Derrida of course finds no value in these views. In my research I discovered that there was relatively little religious violence in premodern Asian societies. This led me to suspect that it was modernist forms of thought, introduced primarily by Euro-American colonizers and missionaries, that was the culprit. My conclusion was, phrased bluntly, that these outsiders convinced Asians to become Hindu and Buddhist fundamentalists. I have one chapter on the Tai Ping Rebellion where Chinese converts to Presbyterianism were responsible for the single largest number of people (upwards of 20 million) killed in the name of religion.

In my initial book research, I came across writings about Indonesian religion that appeared to confirm my thesis, but I did not pursue these leads. A recent trip to Southeast Asia inspired me to write that missing chapter. At 282 million people Indonesia is the largest Muslim majority nation, and it is a democratic republic that protects its religious minorities. In addition to Islam, it recognizes five other official religions. In order of size of population, the religions are Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

In the early years of founding the Indonesian state, Islamic authorities proposed that only the monotheistic religions be allowed official recognition. Again, moderation and tolerance prevailed in a court decision that ruled that a religion must only affirm the existence of “divine substances,” which would recognize the Atman-Brahman (Godhead) of Bali's Hinduism, and also, I would think, the animistic folk religions. Over the decades the Indonesian government has encouraged, as a way of alleviating overpopulation on the island of Java where 55% of the people live, transmigration across the islands. Some Muslims chose to resettle in Maluku Province where a majority were Christians. In 1999, violence broke out between the two religions and over 1,000 people died. In other areas of Western Indonesia where there are also Christian majorities Muslim homes and mosques have been burned in protest.

As in many other parts of the world Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia was a late (modernist) development. Jemaah Islamiyah, Al-Qaeda's Indonesian wing, was founded in 1993, and it was responsible for the horrific Bali bombings in 2002. Significantly, the targets were not the Hindu majority, but the 152 Australians, Americans, Canadians, New Zealanders, and Europeans who

died. A message from Osama bin Laden was found in the terrorists' belongings. It read: "You will be killed just as you kill, and you will be bombed just as you bomb."

Jacqueline Cleland, Oakridge Christian Ministry, Jhc.chJ@hotmail.com

"Heart to Art: Artistic Adaptations and Faith Transmission at Oakridge Christian Ministry"

VIRTUAL

In the vibrant landscape of Vancouver's Chinese Christian community, Oakridge Christian Ministry navigates the crucial task of faith transmission to both Chinese Canadians and their wider Canadian community through innovative artistic adaptations. Building upon the understanding of faith formation in immigrant churches looking to do outreach and the specific context of Oakridge Christian Ministry, this paper analyzes how the congregation balances its connection to the heritage of the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church with the need to engage a more contemporary, English-speaking demographic. It will examine specific examples of artistic adaptations – in music, visual arts, or other mediums – and consider their effectiveness in communicating Christian values and fostering a sense of belonging for people navigating cultural and religious identities.

Nick Gier, University of Idaho, ngier006@gmail.com

Slide Presentation: "Waiting for the Queen: Bali's Cremation of the Century"

In 1992, I was privileged to join a two-week Smithsonian tour to Bali, and I finally had a chance to scan the slides from that trip. Just last month I had the opportunity to visit again this time as the guest of a Balinese Hindu priest. The presentation will focus on a temple birthday celebration and then the largest cremation of the 20th Century. Over 170 families put off their own cremations so that they could join a Balinese queen's cremation. In my travels throughout India I had never seen such elaborate cremation ceremonies, which indicates to me that there are indigenous elements to this amazing tradition.

Experimental Exegesis

Gilad Elbom, Oregon State University, gilad.elbom@gmail.com

"The Psychological Eschatology of Sefer Yetzirah and Adjacent Kabbalistic Cosmologies"

VIRTUAL

This paper examines the double Hebrew letters in the Book of Formation—Sefer Yetzirah—as gateways to a psychological understanding of opposing forces in the human realm and the divine system. Based on the duality of masculine and feminine elements, kabbalistic cosmologies envision an eventual return to the origin of creation: to the female aspect of the divine entity that predated time and space. The role of humanity, according to these narratives, is to rectify the inherent imperfection of the divinity itself. More specifically, humanity is bound to facilitate the integration of the masculine and feminine principles inside the individual, in broader social spheres, and in the supernal worlds. This paper traces the development of these

cosmological and eschatological narratives, especially against the background of national traumas: the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the late fifteenth-century expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal.

Matthew Fortin, Independent Scholar, maf2581@g.harvard.edu

“What the Spiritual Practice of Rune Magic in Contemporary Paganism and Western Esoteric Hermeneutics of Kabbalah Can Learn From Each Other”

Sefer Yetzirah is the oldest and most mysterious Kabbalistic text. The scholarly debate ignores the analytical category of the seven double letters: a complexity that needs some sorting out. An investigation reveals a complex, multifaceted, and vibrant metaphysics of letters and numbers. This metaphysics appears to share parallel methodologies with Runes in the Havamal and Icelandic Rune Poem. How is alternative spiritual practice informed by these parallel methodologies in the metaphysics of numbers and letters? How can letters and numbers be animated for artistic expression in Western esoteric hermeneutics of Kabbalah and for bind runes within Rune magic alike?

Connor Mahoney, Gonzaga University, mahoneyc@gonzaga.edu

“The Speculative Significance of Original Sin”

Original sin is a foundational concept to the Christian tradition. While not universally accepted by every denomination, it is a core tenet for most. However, many of these denominations do not hold to a literalist account of creation. This is problematic if original sin is a foundational concept, since the disobedience of Adam is its cause. A possible move would be to give original sin a symbolic interpretation. However, this runs the danger of vitiating the significance of the concept, and further, of undermining the demand for reconciliation that the breach between man and God created. Undermining this demand would then diminish the role and significance of Christ to the Christian tradition. It will be argued that the philosophical account of original sin given by Hegel solves this problem.

To Hegel, the account of Adam and Eve’s disobedience is a symbolic account that represents the essential nature of thought; for Hegel, human nature is rooted in and defined by thought. It is thought’s nature to begin its development via transgression, which pairs well with the disobedience of Adam and Eve since their violation was taking from the Tree of Knowledge. The breach between humanity and God was due to a free act of thought, and for the sake of thought’s gain. At the same time, according to Hegel, it is by the same freedom (characteristic of thinking activity) that reconciliation is reached.

In his interpretation, reconciliation still is accomplished via the Incarnation. However, with his interpretation, this is a moment of development for human self-consciousness where thought realizes its own divinity by the action of God becoming human and finite. The death of Christ, and later unification via the Holy Spirit, lets finite human thought remember its essential connection with the nature of God.

It will be argued that the appeal of the Hegelian Speculative account is that by interpreting it as an allegory concerning the nature of thought, the necessity of moments (that constitute the tradition) is still maintainable. Although complete satisfaction of tradition's demand may not be satisfiable, it is the position of this project that the conceptual account given by Hegel is beyond true to the spirit of the story, and further, presents the appeal of not having to fall into the contradiction of believing original sin while not holding to a literalist position.

**Christopher S. Morrissey, Trinity Western University, Chris.Morrissey@twu.ca
"Abraham, Isaac, and the Euthyphro Dilemma" VIRTUAL**

This paper discusses the philosophical significance of the sacrificial episode in Genesis 22:1–19 (with father versus son), by interpreting it through the lens of the Euthyphro dilemma (with son versus father). Socrates challenges the allegedly pious action of Euthyphro harming his father, allegedly in conformity with a divine commandment. Socrates points out to Euthyphro that either morality is exclusively defined by God's will, or it is not. (Logically, by the law of excluded middle, it cannot be both.) But if morality is exclusively defined by God's will, then God is arbitrary. If not, then God is superfluous to moral reasoning. Concerning morality, therefore, it seems God is either arbitrary or superfluous. Euthyphro does not resolve this dilemma, but Abraham does. Abraham calls God's bluff by performatively illustrating that if the dilemma's first premise is an exclusive disjunction, then the argument is invalid unless the conclusion is an inclusive disjunction.

**Anna Nowland, Independent Scholar, anowland@zagmail.gonzaga.edu
"Paul's Path to Mutual Recognition"**

Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians uses a tone of reassurance in response to the crisis of faith experienced by the Thessalonians. They were in the process of solidifying their Christian identity in their grasping and accepting of the Christian doctrines. The prescriptive elements of the letter involve and implicate morality in things like love, humility, and perseverance, and Paul also tells them to labor as a means to independence. When described as such, elements of both Hegelian and Nietzschean thought are evoked. In the choice of the Thessalonians to convert, there was an implied sense of spiritual dissatisfaction in their worship of previous traditions, and they lacked the types of power the ruling aristocracy held. This conversion reinvigorates their sense of spiritual power, something not held through material means. When approached with a Nietzschean view, Paul calls upon the Thessalonians to establish a slave morality in response to the power held by the master morality of aristocracy and those persecuting Christian belief. As the other to their social situation, they lacked Hegelian recognition, and in their suffering and reaction to it, they stood as relationally defined by the master. The aspect of laboring for the sake of independence, however, helps in the development of their self-consciousness, or a non-relational notion of their Christian identity. While Nietzsche uses the example of Christianity in a way that makes it sound like moral domination by the slave, the morally prescriptive content of Paul's letter emerges as the grounds for mutual recognition if their identity is no longer structured concerning a master. In living these values honestly,

Nietzsche's conception of will is overcome, and domination is left behind. Viewing this letter through this combined Hegelian and Nietzschean framework, it emerges that Paul is describing the path to true mutual recognition through his Christian belief.

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"Patriarchs, Weeping, and Child Sacrifice: The Book of Job in Dialogue with the Binding of Isaac"

This paper places the binding of Isaac with the story of the book of Job: why is Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son lauded, yet Job's lament over the death of his children portrayed as the correct response? This paper will critically engage J. Richard Middleton's *Abraham's Silence: The Binding of Isaac, the Suffering of Job, and How to Talk Back to God* in order to suggest, contrary to Middleton's work, that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son is a display of righteous faithfulness, though Job's lament at the death of his children is equally laudable. This paper will examine the psychological dimensions of both stories in order to discuss the justification of each character, in addition to the function of lament in the redemption cycle. In so doing, I will suggest an alternate interpretation of the binding of Isaac: that we may imagine Abraham weeping as he leads his son to be slaughtered.

Kooper Wilson, Portland State University, kooper@pdx.edu

"Deconstructing the Freudian Animal in *Moses and Monotheism*"

Animals populate every margin of the history of psychoanalysis—as totems, uncanny symbols, and phobias. With the rise of critical animal studies and the “the question of the animal” in deconstruction, renewed attention has been drawn to the role of animals within psychoanalytic theory and practice. In this paper, I attend to the traces of animals in Sigmund Freud's last book *Moses and Monotheism* and how they relate to his central argument about the origin of monotheistic religion and human culture in general. Following Jacques Derrida's engagement with animals and recent research on how the human/animal relation manifests in Freud's writings, I examine Freud's references and mentions of animals in his account of the development of monotheism and his treatment of the Biblical Exodus. I ask how Freud negotiated the human/animal distinction found in the Biblical text and in what ways his theorization may illuminate or complicate it. I conclude that animals and their appearance in the Bible play an implicit but indispensable role in Freud's last attempt to write about his interpretation of religion, cultural development, and collective memory. By attending to how animals influenced both the development of monotheism and Freudian psychoanalysis, my paper serves as a step towards a greater appreciation of how we historically relate to other species and how human subjectivity in general is constituted by traces of animal otherness.

Hebrew Bible

Ehud Ben Zvi ehudbenzvi@ualberta.ca

“What does “Samuel the Prophet” have to do with Josiah?” VIRTUAL

What purposes did the reference to “Samuel the Prophet” in 2 Chr 35:18 serve? What did it do? Is Samuel mentioned solely to mark a particular period of time? Or evoking his memory carried also its own significance, given how Samuel was remembered by the literati among which Chronicles emerged? This paper would explore these questions from a perspective informed by Social Memory and with much attention to the social eco-cultural system of the relevant literati and some of the large meta-narratives conveyed by Chronicles as a book.

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“A Biblical Example of Sumptuary Law: Aaron Alone Wears: *SHA’ATNEZ*”

The Hebrew Bible contains several commandments and/or divine instructions legislating dress. One is the prohibition against the wearing of garments made of a mixture of materials (*kil’ayim ša’aṭnēz*; Lev. 19:19), and specifically against wearing garments made of a mixture (*ša’aṭnēz*) of wool and linen (Deut. 22:11). Another example of a requirement about dress is the LORD’s instruction in Exod. 28 that Aaron should wear garments, at his consecration as high priest, made of *tēkēlet*, *’argāmān*, and *tôla’at šānî* together with linen; *i.e.*, that Aaron should wear garments of *ša’aṭnēz*. Taken together, these two examples mandate that Aaron, and Aaron alone, wears *ša’aṭnēz*. In legal parlance, this is an example of sumptuary law. In particular, it is an example of the large subcategory of sumptuary law that is related to dress—those laws which either *forbid* or *prescribe* the wearing of specific styles by specific classes of persons. In this paper, I: (1) review the nature of sumptuary law and provide early examples from Greece, Persia, and Rome; (2) demonstrate that the phrase “*tēkēlet*, *’argāmān*, and *tôla’at šānî*” necessarily refers to dyed wool; (3) review the few archaeological examples of *ša’aṭnēz* textiles from the southern Levant; (4) develop the proposal that Exod. 28 and Deut. 22:11 together constitute an example of sumptuary law; and (5) explore the ramifications that arise from the recognition of Exod. 28 and Deut. 22:11 together as a biblical example of a sumptuary law.

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“Prophets and Hairy Mantles: When a Negative Becomes a Positive or Is What You Don’t Wear as Important as What You Do Wear?”

In Zechariah 13:4, the MT declares that the prophets “will not put on a hairy mantle to deceive,” while the LXX translation appears to state the opposite: “they will put on a hairy mantle because they lied.” This paper explores the reason for the apparent contradiction, evaluating the textual critical issues, exploring the variant readings, and assessing critical commentary on the passage. This paper seeks a resolution to the question: does the apparently opposite statement of the LXX OG say essentially the same thing as the proto-MT?

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“Lessons from Lemuel’s Momma: The אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל, Healthy Masculinity, and Guiding Young Men to Spiritual Maturity”

Proverbs is a collection of wisdom writings thought, by some scholars, to be used in a school setting or environment, preparing young males for leadership and service to the community and court. These writings provide insight from Israel as well as other cultures. The final Proverb, known for describing a wife of noble character (אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל) is an instruction from a king’s mother addressing leadership and justice. The use of the Hebrew/Aramaic, מַה בָּרִי, emphasized the mother’s strong rebuke of her son, challenging him to remember his role in justice (31:8-9) while seeking sobriety and a strong wife (אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל). This strong wife complements his focus on justice at the center of the following acrostic song/poem expressing her acts in the community (31:20-21). Just as Lady Wisdom (הַכְּמָה) holds a unique presence in the collection of Proverbs as a rare voice in ancient wisdom literature, so King Lemuel’s mother continues this strong voice through the actions of the (אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל). In our American culture, which tends to promote Toxic Masculinity, women’s voices are silenced while males are encouraged to practice an unhealthy form of maleness which harms males and females. Religious Nationalism reinforces this practice by providing a vehicle to extend that oppression for males and females who seek spirituality through various congregations in the US. As a college instructor and minister working to address toxic masculinity, intimate partner violence, and misogyny, I find “Lemuel’s Momma” to have important advice for males striving to live in harmony with females in cultures which devalue women. Rather than Proverbs 31 being a form of oppression for women (or an expression of the “ideal woman”), the chapter challenges males to listen to the voices of females providing partnership and provide wholeness to male development. (If submitted to the Religion and Society Section I will add the component of Toxic Masculinity and Religious Nationalism).

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**“Untangling the Ambiguity of Identity in Joshua 9: Clothing as Multivalent Connecting Device”
VIRTUAL**

While the connection between clothing and identity in BH narrative has been readily affirmed in recent scholarship, this connection has been largely overlooked in the book of Joshua. In this paper, I will argue that the clothing references in the account of the Gibeonite episode in Josh 9 serve to resolve the ambiguity of the Gibeonites' characterization and portray them as a robust foil for Israel's own national reflection.

Across three threads, the clothing references develop the narrator's portrayal of the Gibeonites as humble servants in the immediate pericope, they continue the trope in the book of Joshua of evolution of identity found in Rahab, Joshua, and Achan (each of which feature their own engagement with textiles), and finally, establish intertextual connections to Deuteronomy to elevate the evolution of identity trope from individualistic concerns to national ones. In so doing, revealed is a primary concern—not with the fate of the native Canaanite peoples—but rather with the quality of Israel’s own identity as a faithful, YHWH-following people.

Joshua 9 thus provides to the Israelite people as a whole both a warning regarding the potential course of their own behavior, and instruction (or reminder) for their ongoing campaign in the land. We will thus see that the clothing language in Josh 9 functions as a multivalent connecting device, operating at various layers of context: its immediate narrational surroundings; the larger flow of the book of Joshua; and in dialogue with the Pentateuch. Taken together, these multivalent connections fostered by clothing language provide a refreshed and robust understanding of the Gibeonites and the identity concerns found in Josh 9.

**Caden Hildenbrand, Student George Fox University, childrenbrand22@georgefox.edu
 “The Sun Stops: How Interpretations of Joshua 10:12-14 Have Significant Impact in the Faith-Science Discussion”**

How should scholars interpret accounts of the miraculous in the Hebrew Bible in light of modern scientific understanding? Furthermore, what implications might the conclusions of such interpretations have for ideas of biblical inerrancy/infallibility or the believability of Christianity in general? Within my presentation, I hope to add to this faith-science discussion, drawing on personal research of Joshua 10:12-14 which includes source materials such as the writings of Josephus and various commentaries for further insight. My research approaches this passage from multiple perspectives, utilizing personal Hebrew translations (using the knowledge gained from taking 2 semesters of Biblical Hebrew), historical context, literary context, passage structure, form, and grammatical data, as well as reception history where this passage has seen historical connection to figures such as Galileo and Copernicus during the debate over a Heliocentric versus Geocentric model of the universe. Additionally, in this presentation, I will seek to address the ongoing discussion of the philosophy of history within biblical scholarship and specifically how an understanding of the methodologies of history construction within Ancient Israel can assist in our manner of biblical interpretation today. In this regard, I will draw on the thoughts of scholars Megan Bishop Moore and Hans M. Barstad who have both sought to address this topic in the field of biblical scholarship.

**Jennifer Matheny, Baylor University, jenny_matheny@baylor.edu
 “Ruth and Esther as “Sharp Dressed Women” *Dress as a Means for Identity Alteration(s)*,”
 VIRTUAL**

This chapter will explore intertextual connections through the function of dress as a means for ethnic identity and political meditation with the characters of Ruth and Esther. Scholars have revealed intertextual relationships between Ruth and Esther through gender, ethnicity, and identity (Avnery, Peters). Ruth and Esther also demonstrate meaningful literary and thematic connections as texts in the Megilloth and have been suggested as the thematic frame of the Megilloth (Davis). As a literary frame to this important collection in the Writings, these texts are named after marginalized women who alter identity through dress. Attention to particular items of dress will illuminate how dress functions in scandalous negotiations, shaping the future(s) of Israel.

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“Ensembles of Access: The puzzling Case of Sacral Apparel on the Day of Atonement” VIRTUAL

In Israel’s wilderness sanctuary, ritual boundaries are marked by cloth. Priests ordained in the same sacramental textiles as the tent’s coverings are given access to the ritual sphere that corresponds to their dress: ordinary priests in tunics and caps of twined linen reflect the linen hangings of the outer court, while the high priest is clad in multi-layered garments that replicate the elaborate wool and linen weaves of the sanctuary. To access the graded spheres of holy ground, priests must be cloaked in the cloth that defines its sphere. Yet, this pattern breaks down on the Day of Atonement when the high priest is commanded to enter the Holy of Holies clothed in plain linen garb that is not at all reflective of the lavish ornamentation found in the innermost sanctuary. This unexpected change of dress may be resolved through an overlooked hand-held accessory essential to ritual performance—a firepan in which the high priest burns incense in the Holy of Holies. Burning sacral aromatics, he makes scent his garment, cloaking himself with YHWH’s personal aroma. The firepan he carries produces a simulacrum of the divine presence through fiery coals wrapped in smoke. The high priest is granted access because he is dressed in a scented cloud and image of the theophany that already indwells the divine throne room.

Moshe Rachmuth, Portland State University, rachmuth@pdx.edu

“A Headdress Made of Barley: The Drama of Reading Ruth 3:15-18”

The word *miṭpaḥath* (מִטְפָּחַת) is a *hapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible, appearing only in Ruth 3:15. Translations into English include “garment” (ESV), “shawl” (NIV), “veil” (KJV, CJB), and “mantle” (ASV). In 2022, I suggested that it’s a head cover, similar to a modern bandanna, and that it was crucial to determine what the word means in order to understand the amount of barley that Boaz sends to Naomi bundled in Ruth’s *miṭpaḥath*, and how Naomi deciphers Boaz’s message that he will hurry to solve the issue of Ruth’s widowhood.

In 2023, I challenged the common reading that Boaz gave Ruth six measures of barley wrapped in her *miṭpaḥath*. If indeed he gave her six measures, then a *miṭpaḥath* must be a bigger garment that can serve as an impromptu sack, as all the above translations express. The new reading I propose is that Boaz sends the “shesh” as a code: a secret message that communicates his intention to feed, to beautifully clothe, and to marry Ruth.

In 2024, I added readings of receptions of Ruth in visual art, and the problem of basing one’s research, as I had done, on the language of indigenous population, in this case Palestinian dialect. In response to feedbacks I have got in 2023 and 2024, I decided to put the work that used Palestinian terminology for women’s headdress in the background, and instead moved to base my argument more heavily on conversations with modern commentaries of *Ruth*.

Moshe Rachmuth, Portland State University, rachmuth@pdx.edu

“She Asked for Nothing other than What Hegai Suggested (Esther 2:15): Clothes as Personhood”

Laura Quick argues that “clothing takes on the personhood of the wearer.”¹ In essence it is also the wearer who gets their personhood from the clothes, as in the case of David who wears Jonathan’s clothes, thus becoming the legitimate heir to King Saul. Clothes here should be interpreted broadly, also including jewelry and cosmetics, the paradigmatic example for the broad interpretation being the anointment in olive oil which transforms a man to a king.

In Esther 2, I will argue, Esther understands that in order to become the king’s new wife she has to be dressed as the king expects from his wife. Her clothing (oils, perfumes, and so on) will create a person that Ahasuerus imagines as a wife. In dress studies terms, Esther lives up to the challenge of coming to the king’s bedroom dressed up in such a way that would create in him the mentifact that she is a queen.

In Esther 1, King Ahasuerus impulsively divorces Vashti, a decision that he regrets in chapter 2. As his advisors point out, remarrying Vashti could, unfortunately, create an upheaval of women against their husbands that the king better avoid. Instead, the advisors offer to bring to the palace all the beautiful virgins of the kingdom to compete for the king’s heart. Every virgin would have one night with the king at the end of which she’d be sent to the concubines’ harem except for one girl who’d be the next wife. At her night, the girl can choose what to bring with her, that is what to wear for the king’s seduction. While the other girls make their choices of artifacts, Esther chooses the chooser of her artifacts, Hegai, the king’s eunuch who is in charge of the women. The text doesn’t detail what Hegai chose for Esther. I’d argue that it doesn’t matter. All that matter is the Hegai is an ally of Esther who knows Ahasuerus’s tastes. This enables Esther to come to the king’s chambers dressed in a way that for him is the mentifact of, “queen.”

Abel Sitali, University of Pretoria, sitali07@gmail.com

“Monotheism and the מלאכים (Messengers) in Chronicles: Tracking Persian influence on Jewish Religion” VIRTUAL

The Scribes who composed and redacted the text of the Hebrew Bible in the Persian period were mindful of preserving their source material. However, their developing monotheistic faith left its fingerprints particularly on those texts which evinced Israel’s pre-exilic syncretism. The present study shall argue that pre-exilic Israelite religion was largely syncretistic or even polytheistic and that it was only in the Persian period after the exile that monotheism, the belief in one God while denying all others, was realized. Considering that angelology occupied center-stage in the developing monotheism, the role played by the מלאכים in that development shall be analyzed.

The study shall critically analyze the Persian Zoroastrian religion and how it might have influenced the development of monotheism and the conceptualization of the מלאכים in Judaism. Thus, some characteristic features of the two respective deities, Ahura Mazda and

Yahweh, and how those of the former might have influenced the latter shall be evaluated. By the same token, the possible influence of the Zoroastrian figure 'Angira Mainyu' on the Jewish conceptualization of the השטן (Satan) shall be evaluated. Moreover, some select passages from Chronicles, a book that was written in the Persian period shall be evaluated in order to determine the extent to which Zoroastrianism might have influenced the development of monotheism in Judaism

**Starbuck, Scott, Gonzaga University, starbuck@gonzaga.edu
"Performative Dress as the Visual Center of Psalm 45"**

Psalm 45 is unique among the songs of the Psalter in that it is a hymn glorifying a human being. Equally odd for the psalter, although intelligible within the ancient Near East,^[1] is a celebration of the human being, the human king, as divine. Setting the psalm further apart from the remainder of the collection is the suspicion among many interpreters that it represents, or at least refers to, a wedding ceremony. Despite significant scholarly attention to Psalm 45, much of its artistic vision and ideological power remains diffused and elusive to commentators. As such, scholars tend to import framing assumptions to make sense of the psalm, often pressing the psalm into preconceived notions of Zion theology, royal ideology, or ancient marriage rites. Ironically, the most striking elements of the text, its references to dress, have not been pursued as the obvious clues to unlock the performative claims of the psalm. This study attempts to fill this interpretive lacuna through a type of visual exegesis of Ps. 45 with special attention to its dress cues. In Ps. 45, male and female actors are told to dress themselves with clothing, scent, and object adornment, all of which signal a performative connection with deeper ontologies of beauty, justice, truth, martial efficacy, and international cohesion.

^[1] Hans-Peter Mathys, for example, suggests the entire psalm is adorned by Phoenician ideology and associations, see "Das phönizische Kolorit von Psalm 45," ZAW 133.3 (2021) 371-380.

New Testament and the World of Christianity

**Paul N. Anderson, George Fox University, panderso@georgefox.edu
"Jesus and the Way of the Kingdom in Bi-Optic Perspective"**

While the proclamation of the Kingdom is far more pronounced in the Synoptic Gospels than in the Gospel of John, this does not mean that the eschatological subjects of divine presence, leadership, and ethos are missing from the one Gospel claiming direct contact with Jesus of Nazareth and his ministry. While basileic language in John is found only in 3:3-5 and 18:36-37, the accessibility and character of God's leadership are rife throughout the Fourth Gospel as well as the Synoptic Three. When viewed in bi-optic perspective, God's leadership as proclaimed in the fourfold Gospel witness involves: (a) the eschatological reality of God's presence and love; (b) the scandalizing revelation of God's grace and truth; (c) the transvaluation of worldly hierarchies and structures; (d) the ongoing leadership and guidance of the Spirit; and (e) the eternal reach and measure of the divine realm.

By analyzing the example and teachings of Jesus in the Synoptics and John—in corroborative impression—new insights emerge regarding the eschatological mission of Jesus and its time-changing thrust: both grounded and transcendent.

**Daniel Christensen, Fuller Theological Seminary, danielchristensen@fuller.edu
 “Give Me This Authority:” Power, Authority, and their Transactional Capabilities in the Book of Acts”**

Sociology and the study of religion often differentiate between power and authority in terms of their origins. Power has nebulous origins and is often seen to permeate society and people to varying extents. Authority, by contrast, originates by harnessing the nebulous nature of power already in existence and solidifying it into a legitimate structure. Such ideas about power and authority stem from the works of Foucault (*Power, Truth, Strategy*, 1979), Arendt (“What is Authority?” 1954), Lukes (*Power*, 2005), and Furedi (*Authority*, 2013). Building on these theories of power and authority, I turn to examine their use in the Book of Acts. Specifically, I look at the terms δύναμις (power) and ἐξουσία (authority) throughout Acts’s narrative to explore their relationship. The terms δύναμις (1:8; 2:22; 3:12; 4:7, 33; 6:8; 8:10, 13; 10:38; 19:11) and ἐξουσία (1:7; 5:4; 8:19; 9:14; 26:10, 12, 18) appear throughout the narrative, yet the two words only appear as coordinated terms once (1:7–8). When considering the origins of power and authority vis-à-vis sociology and the study of religion we might ask: How does the Book of Acts differentiate the two concepts? In this paper I argue that the difference between power and authority in Acts has to do with their transactional capabilities. Although the origins of power and authority in Acts align with theories in sociology and the study of religion, their use in the narrative of Acts define their distinction. Power in Acts has its origins in the divine and as such still permeates the narrative’s characters to various degrees. Its function, however, is reserved for miraculous events that are only performed by divinely chosen characters—it is unable to be traded. Authority in Acts is, by contrast, reserved for transactional events and appears as an entity that can be held and transferred among actors. We can see mostly clearly how the author of Acts separates the function of δύναμις and ἐξουσία in the episode of Simon the Magician (8:9–24). Simon had thought that the miraculous ability to lay hands on someone so that they might receive the Holy Spirit was a transferable entity, and so uses the term ἐξουσία in his request. Peter’s rebuke, however, indicates that what Simon was seeking was not authority, but power. This paper uses sociological and narrative theory to propose ways of understanding power and authority within the Book of Acts.

**David P. Ross Alberta Bible College dross16@abccampus.ca
 “Awakened from Slumber: Biographical Reconstruction and Hypocrisy in John Calvin's Reception of Paul's Conversion”**

This paper considers John Calvin's reception of Paul's conversion via his commentaries on portions of Paul's auto-biographical material (Philippians 3:1-16, Romans 7) and on Acts 9:1-19. New Testament scholars have drawn on the insights of the sociological study of religious conversion to argue that Paul engaged in what is known as ‘biographical reconstruction’ after

his conversion. Converts often re-evaluate their prior life in ways that they would not have agreed with at that time. This paper argues that Calvin interpreted Paul as engaging in a kind of biographical reconstruction after his Damascus Road experience. Calvin understood this biographical reconstruction to be a Spirit-enabled transformation of Paul's understanding of his life prior to Christ which had continuing implications for the rest of Paul's life and theology. For Calvin, Paul's transformation was in part a transition from a form of hypocrisy (sincerely yet deludedly believing himself to be more righteous than he actually was) to a true understanding of himself according to God's perspective rather than that of human beings (profoundly in need of divine grace for his sanctification). The insights of the sociological study of religious conversion, especially the literature on biographical reconstruction, yields new insights into Calvin's interpretation of Paul's conversion and also contemporary interpretations of Paul's conversion. The nature of Paul's conversion in particular, as opposed to only his life as a whole and his letters, plays an important role in Calvin's theology, especially in his understanding of sin and justification.

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“To What or to Whom is Jesus the Way in John 14?” VIRTUAL

"Jesus's ostensible statement in John 14:6 that he is the way, the truth, and the life outside of whom no one is able to come to God the Father, has been variously interpreted. One of the more common approaches is the exclusivist/particularist/restrictivist appropriation of John 14:6 in support of the eschatological claim that without a conscious life commitment to Jesus as the Jewish Christos (messiah) during one's lifetime there is no possibility, after life, of gaining access to heaven, where God the Father resides.

I will forward an "inclusively exclusivist" approach. If one symbolically recasts "the father's house" (John 14:2) as the "Temple/people of God," rather than as "heaven," then the intent of John's record of Jesus's words shifts its emphasis away from presenting Jesus as "the way" for one to enter a place ("heaven") towards presenting Jesus as "the way" for one to enter a people ("the universal church/ekklēsia"). This "locational" move also shifts the "exclusivity" emphasis of John 14:6b ("no one comes to the Father except through me"). Rather than viewing Jesus as claiming an exclusive mediatory role for his disciples's access after death to the place where the Father resides ("heaven"), Jesus's claim in John 14:6b then emphasizes his unique and exclusive role for mediating the disciples's direct access to the Father during their earthly lifetime for the purposes of ministry effectiveness (John 14:7–13) and personal intimacy (John 14:20–23). The two above interpretive movements reframe the original message of John 14:6 into an existential presentation of Jesus as "the (only) way" through whom one enters a people (the universal ekklēsia) who are in intimate relationship with a person (God the Father) rather than as "the (only) way" into an eternal resting place.

Affirming an existential—an inaugurated/"already" rather than a future/"not yet"—focus in John 14:6 also impacts contemporary Gospel proclamation. In sum, this inclusively exclusivist reading of John 14 invites Christians to incarnate the truth of Jesus's intimate relationship with

the Father (e.g., John 8:28, 29) into their own lives and then to invite others into that same inaugurated experience of eternal life (zoē; John 10:10) and intimacy with God the Father through a conscious life commitment to Jesus, the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected God-man."

Kurt Queller, University of Idaho (emeritus), kqueller@uidaho.edu

"Now, in this age": Afterlife speculation vs. this-worldly prophetic critique in the gospel of Mark"

In Mark's gospel, Jesus responds twice to queries about the afterlife. In one story, Sadducees (traditionalists who reject resurrection doctrine) proffer the case of a woman successively married to seven brothers and outliving each. In a general resurrection, will she have seven husbands simultaneously? (Polygyny is not categorically excluded under patriarchy, but polyandry is.) Jesus responds by kicking the argument's patriarchal presumptions out from under it: "when they rise from the dead [present tense!], they neither marry nor are given in marriage." The terms are respectively active and passive voice of the same verb (gamizō), meaning to acquire a wife as sexual property. (The corresponding Hebrew marriage terms — ba'al and be'ulah — meant literally "to master [a wife] / be mastered [by a husband].") Jesus ends the discourse with the pronouncement: God is "God not of the dead, but of the living." Whatever else this may mean, it implies a God who is more concerned about a surviving widow's plight than about dead men's sexual property claims.

Elsewhere, a rich man asks what he must do to "inherit" eternal life. The issue is precisely that he has "inherited" vast wealth, in this life. He may indeed have lived virtuously as an individual, but in a pre-capitalist, agrarian society, family wealth is understood to have been accrued at the expense of others. He must therefore abandon his inheritance in favor of the poor, and follow. The disciples are as dismayed at this answer as the man himself: "who then can be saved?" When Peter realizes that Jesus' followers have already done this, Jesus proclaims to all who have abandoned claims of family and property for the gospel's sake a hundredfold reward in family members and possessions — "now, in this age."

This present-day hundredfold reward clearly implies a non-kin-based community, in which wealth and family solidarity are not narrowly channeled along lines of patrilineal inheritance, but are made available to all who have need. The replacement of "fathers" with "persecutions" in the sevenfold list of things regained a hundredfold envisages not biological fathers, but the patriarchal role of pater familias — with the expected consequences.

Both stories attest to a stringent prophetic indictment of patriarchy. The conclusion is not anachronistic; Jesus' attitude reflects an extension of the classical prophetic critique of oppression, consistently extended into the domestic sphere. This critique is evidenced elsewhere in Mark, and indeed in all four canonical gospels.

**Matt Recla, Boise State University, matthewrecla@boisestate.edu
"Jesus the Suicide"**

"Christianity is founded upon the singular figure of Jesus. The basis of Christianity's founding is the theological implication of his activities recorded in the first four Gospels of the New Testament. The crucial event of his life, however, is Jesus' execution at the hand of the Roman state. What likely strikes the (hypothetically) uninformed reader of the stories of Jesus is the nature of his death: Jesus welcomes it. Though ultimately executed by Roman authorities, Jesus refuses multiple direct and indirect opportunities to avoid his execution. Further, he predicts his own demise on several occasions leading up to his trial and punishment. Thus, Jesus' collective story presents him not as an innocent or unwilling victim, but a willing participant in his own demise: a suicide.

The obvious question this raises is why he is not commonly recognized as a suicide today. The primary reason is not because Jesus' death is categorically different than suicide. These categorical separations, I argue, are biased and unsustainable. Rather, Jesus is not known as a suicide because of the stigma which has surrounded most suicides from the Late Antique period forward, which are themselves indirect products of Jesus' suicide.

It is crucial to recognize Jesus as a suicide in order to foster a reckoning with the phenomenon of suicide in the modern world. Suicide is used as a prescriptive term to indicate the self-deaths we cannot make meaning from. In applying the not prescriptive but descriptive term of suicide to Jesus, we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that we appropriate the deaths of certain figures to further ideological and institutional aims, and that we conversely stigmatize suicide when it has no ideological or institutional value. We appropriate the power of death, selectively, to satisfy the living. My hope is that recognition of this exchange may help precipitate a non-stigmatizing approach to suicide and an unwillingness to exploit human death for institutional gain.

In this presentation, I will use Emile Durkheim's definition of suicide to critique prescriptive scholarly reinterpretations of suicides in the ancient Jewish and Christian traditions. I will then briefly review the few scholarly treatments of Jesus as a suicide before arguing that Jesus fits the criteria for a suicide. I will end by discussing what this should (and shouldn't) imply for our understanding of suicide more broadly."

Teaching Religion

**John Sheveland, Gonzaga University, sheveland@gonzaga.edu
"Overwhelmed and Under Water: Teaching religion and violence for resilience at a Catholic university"**

This contribution presents one possible method for teaching a core curriculum course entitled "Religion and Violence" at a Catholic university, and explores the professor's understanding of

the changing student landscape for teaching this course. In short, many of our university students begin a course like this already feeling overwhelmed with the effects of polarization and strain in our democratic institutions. For several years the course has taken a case study approach to the study of religious violence, looking to contemporary case studies for the production for the roles of religion in the production of violence but also for the manner in which co-religionists engage their traditions constructively to build peace. The paper explores the ways in which the course can, against its intent, overwhelm students further rather than provide them with the intellectual and personal skills of resilience necessary to meet the challenges of dysfunction in our societies. Relevant to this dilemma may be a theological approach to the subject matter and the particularity of our university mission statement with its centering of a comprehensive 'cura personalis' (care for the whole person in their entirety).

**Beth Barsotti, Gonzaga University, bbarsotti@gmail.com
 “Formative Education: Contributing to the Process of Becoming”**

How can our classrooms—both in-person and online—more fully contribute to the holistic development of students? This presentation focuses on the concept of formative education, as identified by Boston College. While this educational approach is not exclusive to Jesuit institutions, we will draw on the wisdom of the Ignatian and Jesuit traditions, particularly Ignatian pedagogy, to highlight practices that can be adapted to a variety of educational contexts.

In this session, we will:

1. Define formative education.
2. Explore key elements of Ignatian pedagogy.
3. Identify practical applications of formative education in diverse settings.

While this session is centered on the education of students, we recognize that the flourishing of faculty is equally crucial. Throughout the session, faculty will be invited to reflect on how embracing this transformative approach to education can nurture their own professional and personal growth, allowing them to align their values more deeply with their teaching practices for a more meaningful and integrated experience.

**Lauryn Stanfield, George Fox University, lstanfield22@georgefox.edu
 “The Successes and Shortcomings of Religious Education: A Student’s Perspective”**

What do those currently being educated in religion have to say about the state of religious education? One highly-motivated Biblical Studies student attempts to answer this question on behalf of herself and her peers. In this presentation, I will analyze the status of religious education in the Northwest, discussing where it succeeds and where it falls short. Using a survey of Northwest students, similar prior studies, and my own experience, I will analyze various classroom models such as lecture vs. seminar style, the role of the professor in the

spiritual life of the student, and other significant benefits and detractors to religious education. In particular, I will discuss the shifting role of the professor, how to help your advanced students continue to succeed while also helping your barely-passing students learn to love your content (and how these two goals are more closely related than you might think). This will highlight the needs of highly-motivated students and suggest various ways forward that will better the experiences of students and professors in religious education as well as inspire wonder of religious scholarship in students of all levels.

Glen Fairen, Oklahoma State University, glen.j.fairen@okstate.edu

“The Devil Went Down to Oklahoma: Teaching Introduction to World Religion in the Bible Belt with The Satanic Temple.”

When teaching lower-level or survey classes in Religious Studies, there are a few obstacles that are perhaps not found in other humanities (or unique to our discipline). First it is our object of study. “Religion” is neither a stable, nor easily defined category. Indeed as the late JZ Smith said, “religion can be defined, with greater or lesser success, more than fifty ways.” Second—and compounding the first—is that many students who come to these classes generally have not thought about the fluidity of “Religion,” but assume a prior that they “know” what it is. For the average undergraduate, Religion is a “goes without saying” object; usually based on their own experience which can range from worshiping a god(s), a deeply held belief in their own salvation, some kind generic faith, or in some instances, a dangerous delusion. And while there have been many attempts to provide undergraduate students some basic methodological tools for Religious Studies in classroom, incorporating these models and ideas can not only can be jarring or “dry” to novice students, but—as anyone who has taught a Religious Studies 101 knows—can also dismissed as simply “theory.”

It is here that the pedagogical utility of The Satanic Temple becomes evident. While its mission is to combat what it sees as Christian theocratic tendencies in the United States, instead of just simply restating notions like separation of Church and State, The Satanic Temple combines familiar and generally recognizable “religious” tropes (community, tenants, ritual) with overtly destabilizing elements (monuments to Baphomet vs Ten Commandments, Afterschool Satan Club vs Good News Club, etc.), to draw attention to their claim of Christian privilege.

It is at this intersection that the pedagogical utility of The Satanic Temple as a topic within a survey course, comes clear. With the use, and inversion of, various “goes without saying” elements of Religion, teachers are provided with an ideal tool in The Satanic Temple that can be used to interrogate what can or can not be “religion,” what actually constitutes the religious landscape of North American, and given The Satanic Temple’s “political” goals of, how the political and religious are entwined in the modern world.

Scott Starbuck, Gonzaga University, starbuck@gonzaga.edu

“Pedagogy of Israelite Temples: Promises and Pitfalls of Using Virtual Reality”

The “Temple” grounds and orients much of the ancient Hebrew Bible and New Testament historical contexts. In the religious studies classroom, however, the “temple” is often

under-experienced, especially in terms of its architectural and archetypal significations to an ancient person, let alone the modern student.

The Core course, Messiah and Covenant, is taught at Gonzaga University each semester. The course curriculum provides students with virtual reality engagements with the Herodian Temple. This session will allow participants to experience the assignment as students and critique and improve the assignment from disciplinary expertise and interest.

This presentation is an example of how VR can be used effectively pedagogically in the religious studies classroom. At the same time, the limitations and distortions of VR must be addressed critically.

Theology and Philosophy of Religion

Anita Ansah, Independent Scholar, abaansah27@gmail.com

“The Critical Role of Friendship and Song in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Ghana”

This paper examines the critical role that song and the concept of friendship play in the practices of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) in Ghana. Methodologically, this study utilizes qualitative approaches of interviews and participant observation. Nancy Ammerman’s concept on bonding social capital, Mercy Oduyoye’s notions on ascription of God, and Harvey Cox’s insights on the Pentecostal portrayal of God are theories that are brought to bear to analyze the implications for lived religion. Research on religious networks points to friendships as reflective of succor and aid within groups (Ammerman 2014:3). For social scientists, such groups also provide a type of social capital termed bonding social capital (Ammerman 2014:114). A participant from the CCR stated, “I joined the CCR because of friendship. I have made many friends. God helps me in my personal life. I had three miscarriages, but now I have two children. For that matter, I know that God is present.” Thus, adherents claim that they consider God a friend they depend on. They express such friendship as a real presence. Pentecostal Christianity portrays a God who is not aloof and who intervenes in human lives (Cox 2001:5). Additionally, societies call God ascriptions per their human experiences. This implies that groups of people make God in their image (Oduyoye 1995:111). Therefore, God is for many of the adherents a divine friend of benevolence.

The following chorus is one of the worship songs at the opening session of a CCR meeting: “Lord, sit by me a little longer, night is about to fall. Your teaching gives me comfort. Therefore, my Lord, sit by me a little longer. Night is about to fall.” It encapsulates one of the major aims of the CCR. This aim is to go further with the divine and spend more time in fellowship. It speaks to the immanence of God in the lives of the adherents as succor and anchor. Pentecostalism portrays an attentive God, one who is not distant toward human challenges (Cox 2001:5-6). Furthermore, Pentecostal spirituality practiced via the medium of the CCR leads to a measure of spiritual knowledge. Such religious groups are a repository of moral/spiritual guidance (Ammerman 2007: 3).

Gilad Elbom, Oregon State University, gilad.elbom@gmail.com

“From Inner Conflict to Divine Growth: Introducing Defragmentation Theology” VIRTUAL

This paper introduces defragmentation theology as a key concept that informs the portrayal of God in the Hebrew Bible. In many cases, God appears as a fragmented deity who must learn to illuminate his own unconscious: a literary character that navigates between conflicting emotions, conflicting notions of the reality that he creates, conflicting attitudes toward his own presence in the text, toward his place in history, and toward his involvement in the lives of other characters. Despite the evident evolution of the masculine God, conventional approaches prefer to see him as an unchanging concept: a symbol of absolute consistency rather than an apparent process. Given the fact that mainstream Christian doctrines have, by and large, very little to do with the portrayal of God in the Hebrew Bible, it is not surprising that a seemingly new idea like process theology had to be invented in order to argue what the biblical text demonstrates quite explicitly: that God is mutable, less than omnipotent, and actively involved in human life. The Hebrew Bible makes it clear, at least from a literary point of view, that God is a dynamic character who changes in response to historical events, political developments, and other plot points. What defragmentation theology suggests is that he also grows. And the more he grows, the less conflicted he becomes.

Nicholas Fieseler, Independent Scholar, nlfieseler@gmail.com

“Incarnational Theology Re-Imagined” VIRTUAL

The relationship between conceptions of a creator God and models of evolutionary development has been characterized mainly by each position’s inability to acknowledge the possibilities of the other. Rather than rejecting each view as incompatible with one another, or with academically unsatisfying attempts to harmonize the two positions, this presentation attempts to philosophically and theologically reinterpret the role of Christian theism in light of understanding evolutionary development as a reality existence. Philosophically, I propose the use of Luis de Molina’s theory of middle knowledge as one possible means of reconciling divine omniscience with quantum uncertainty and biological evolution, while theologically, the concept of theosis will be utilized to rearticulate the role of Christ’s incarnation in light of evolutionary and quantum realities as a means of demonstrating humanity’s gradual evolutionary development from animal—to physical human—to spiritual human being as modeled on the work of Christ. The subsequent re-imagining of atonement theology in favor of an evolutionary form of theosis allows for a possible rapprochement between divine omniscience and creaturely freedom in a manner allowing for the free development of spiritual human beings.

Bruce Hiebert, University Canada West, bruce.hiebert@ucanwest.ca

“Deconstructing moral responsibility: A Response to Derrida, Caputo, and Badiou”

Jacques Derrida, John Caputo, and Alain Badiou have each examined the concept of moral responsibility and found it wanting. This presentation explores the key work of each of these

philosophers and how they have constructed their arguments against moral responsibility. In turn, this presentation uses Michel Meyer's problematology to raise a critical inquiry into the foundations of these perspectives and raise other possibilities. Using Meyer's framework, it is possible to restore the concept of moral responsibility to its place, though in turn this leads to a further critique of moral responsibility as conventionally considered. Following Meyer, it is only by rooting moral responsibility in the context of collective problems that it still makes sense as a concept. This in turn shifts the focus of moral responsibility from the individual decision-maker to the collective context.

Colton Kirby, George Fox University, ckirby22@georgefox.edu

"Aquinas's Third Way Against Objections: Why God is a Better Explanation than the Universe or Particles"

Thomas Aquinas's Third Way of proving the existence of God (the central passage is ST I.2.3 but an earlier version of the argument, which provides helpful reasoning, can be found in SCG I.15.5) is likely the most misunderstood and maligned of the Five Ways. Simply put, in the Third Way (TW) Aquinas argues that "possible" beings must at some time not exist and thus need to rely on a "necessary" Being. Almost all of the work done on the TW over the last fifty years deals principally with whether or not the argument is in itself coherent (and this is perhaps why the secondary literature on the TW, in particular, is so extensive) rather than the success of said argument once understood in a certain way. My presentation will focus less on the former and more on the latter. Thus, I will first offer an interpretation of the TW which will largely draw on the work of Brian Davies, Michael Augros, and Martin J. De Nys. After this, I will move to the more important and interesting question of whether or not the argument, even with a coherent and faithful reading, succeeds against strong objections. I will posit that the best competitor with Aquinas's necessarily-existent Being (God) is a necessarily-existent universe or, even, a set of necessarily-existent set of particles. However, I will argue that God, as opposed to a universe or set of particles, is a more compelling explanation in part because (1) God is a more simple explanation (despite the fact that you must have God plus said universe or particles); (2) more sophisticated understandings of necessarily-existent particles, in particular, lack compelling reason why contingent beings should exist; (3) a view which only has a necessarily-existent universe or particles lacks reason to believe in generally desired metaphysical concepts (e.g. composite objects); (4) whatever is the cause (God, universe, or particles) must cause all entities in the universe including time and space—there must, therefore, be some way that this cause is outside both time and space in order to cause it. Thus, my presentation will attempt to "steel man" various objections, argue for the insufficiency of even these objections, and thereby explore less trod ground in modern scholarship on the TW.

Julie Land, Western Theological Seminary, julie.land@westernsem.edu

"The Eucharist, Friendship, and John's Gospel"

This paper will explore the link between friendship and the Eucharist in the Gospel of John. I will consider how John understands friendship with God in order to more fully understand

inter-human friendships. To move towards a theological understanding of friendship, this paper will offer a theological reading of the Gospel of John 6.51-58 and 15.1-17 as located within their wider literary and narrative contexts. In this reading, friendship is grounded in God's covenant with human beings. It exposes and resists false social hierarchies and the socially embedded ways we objectify and dehumanize one another. Friendship for John is tied to his account of the Eucharist. It is rooted in God's merciful actions towards us in Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Friendship in the Gospel of John raises salient questions for the Church.

Donghyung Lee, Yale Divinity School, donghyung.lee@yale.edu

“Three Ways to Respond to the Problem of Evil: Adams, Ekstrom, and Kilby” VIRTUAL

On the problem of evil, Marilyn McCord Adams critiques the traditional analytic “logical” approach, emphasizing the significance of the “how” rather than the “why.” Meanwhile, Laura W. Ekstrom and Karen Kilby also propose alternative responses, each shedding new light on the limitations of generic and global theodicies. This paper examines three ways to respond to the problem of evil—Adams, Ekstrom, and Kilby—that critique the traditional analytical approaches and, in dialogue with each other, ultimately support Adams's argument, suggesting embracing Kilby's Apophatic approach. First, this paper delineates Adams's vision of defeating evil through “beatific vision,” examining her claim that horrendous evils must be engulfed rather than merely offset. In confronting criticisms—the challenge that if evils are eventually transformed into a great good, there should be no hesitation in experiencing evil—I argue that John Pittard's norms of hope, a non-consequentialist view of the problem of evil, successfully address this question. Second, this paper explores Ekstrom's skeptical perspective, analyzing the relationship between free will's value and evil's existence. While her criticisms highlight significant limitations in traditional theodicies, I argue that her view opens the need for a more robust alternative. Third, Kilby underscores the epistemic limitations of theology, suggesting that the profound facets of divine reality remain mysterious. Although Kilby's apophatic approach contrasts with Adams's concrete vision, both can coexist. Ultimately, I argue in favor of Adams's beatific vision of defeating horrendous evils while incorporating Kilby's emphasis on divine mystery, forming a theological framework where individuals can affirm God's goodness and the defeat of evils without presuming a complete explanation.

Colin Ludwig, Gonzaga University, ludwig@gonzaga.edu

“The Rejection of Theological Proofs in German Idealism”

Throughout the history of philosophy, the ‘ontological argument’ for God's existence has appeared frequently, with many minor variations. In its most basic sense, the ontological argument asserts that, if there were an absolutely necessary being, a being whose essence was ‘to be,’ it would imply that this being existed. This being not only exists in the mind, but the conception of this being must necessarily imply its reality. Though discussions of this argument have not ceased, its prevalence has vastly diminished. Kant's analysis of proofs for God's existence in his Critique of Pure Reason also led to the Ontological argument falling out of

fashion. Hegel also discussed the Ontological argument at length in his *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*.

Eventually, both thinkers reject proofs for God; Kant states this outright, whereas Hegel maintains that their scope and power are limited. The question they were concerned with can be posed as such: why do proofs for God's existence fail? Regarding the ontological argument, these philosophers agree, in part, that one of its shortcomings involves its purely conceptual nature. On one hand, Kant believed that the argument invalidated itself because there was nothing that necessarily connected the concept of 'the highest being' to the idea of 'actuality.' Hegel argued for a deeper connection between thought and being, but the ontological argument, particularly Anselm's version, failed to connect the two. Hegel thought it was merely reasoning with the abstract instead of something more concrete.

This paper will explore their reasons for rejecting theological proofs. Through a detailed description of their arguments regarding the ontological proof, it will be apparent that neither human faith nor reasoning is strengthened by holding to theological arguments. It is important to note that although they both reject the ontological argument, they do not agree on the nature of God's existence, and whether it can be understood. With a detailed consideration of each philosopher's operative logic, one can come to a deeper understanding regarding human cognition, specifically its limits, how we overcome them, and how we ought to resolve or analyze contradictions in our logic. Additionally, both offer novel insights into the relationship between reason and God and can lead us to a more holistic and nuanced conception of God.

**Norman Metzler, Concordia University, npjmetzler@outlook.com
"Original Mortality?"**

N.T. Wright and his school of New Creationism claim that prior to the Fall into sin, Adam and Eve were perfect and immortal, capable of living physically forever. Although the Fall into sin imposed on humans a "sinful nature" that renders all people mortal, Christ came to infuse us with the Holy Spirit that removes our sinful nature and enables us to be "restored" to our original immortality in the "new creation" of the "enhanced" or "transphysical" kingdom of God. We will make the case that a close reading of the Genesis creation accounts actually reveals that Adam and Eve were in fact mortal in their innocent state prior to the Fall. They were created with a life cycle like all living things, and they never got to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life that would have imparted eternal life to them. Humanity from its beginning was faced with the fundamental choice symbolized by the two trees placed before them in the center of the Garden of Eden: either to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life and live with God forever; or to disobey God, eat the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and suffer alienation from God and death. Once they made the choice to disobey God's will and eat the forbidden fruit, they were barred from the Garden and access to the Tree of Life, and therefore were unable to eat the fruit that could have given them eternal life in their fallen, sinful state. Therefore, our resurrection to eternal life in the kingdom of God will not be the restoration of

our inherently perfectible, immortal physical bodies, but rather the transformation of our present physical mortal bodies into totally new, immortal spiritual bodies.

**Christopher S. Morrissey, Trinity Western University, Chris.Morrissey@twu.ca
“Aquinas on the Impossibility of Self-Movers and of Infinite Regresses of Merely Secondary Causes” VIRTUAL**

The First Way of Thomas Aquinas to demonstrate God’s existence (*Summa Theologiae* I, q.2, a.3) is best understood in its fundamental structure as a valid and sound *modus ponens* argument with two main premises. If everything that is moved is moved by another, then there must ultimately be an unmoved mover as the primary cause. But everything that is moved *is* moved by another. Therefore, there must ultimately be an unmoved mover as the primary cause. It is hard to discern how these two premises are indisputably true, but the brilliance of Aquinas’s argument is that he proves each premise to be true by using the elegant technique of indirect proof. Aquinas performs two *reductio ad absurdum* proofs demonstrating the impossibility of self-movers in any possible universe, and the impossibility of denying that an infinite regress of secondary causes is compatible with the existence of a purely actual unmoved mover.

**Rangi Nicholson, Māori Anglican Church in Aotearoa (New Zealand),
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“Māori Theological Perspectives on Treaty Partnership in the Public Square” VIRTUAL**

Partnership between Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Crown (the government and judiciary) is highly varied, highly contextual, and highly contested. At the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi, in 1840, tribal chiefs clearly were prepared to share their political and economic power with the British Crown. Without the involvement of reputable Anglican and other missionaries who translated, promoted, and signed the Treaty, it would have been unlikely that the Treaty would have gained any real traction among Māori. Within thirty years of the signing, the balance of power had shifted to the rapidly increased number of Pākehā (white) settlers who advanced the development of a Pākehā settler state and the cause of colonisation. Colonial governments, the judiciary and other key stakeholders such as the Churches, consigned the Treaty relationship and its obligations to the position of historic artefact. Since the mid-1970s, the Anglican Church and the Crown have belatedly recognised that injustices have occurred as a result of such a position. Alongside the Crown, it was the Anglican Church, in its search for justice, peace, and reconciliation in the mid-1980s, that contributed to the recovery of the concept of partnership. It was this Church that gave a central position to the Treaty in its 1992 Constitution and subsequent policymaking. Given the Church’s Treaty obligations, it is pertinent to examine contemporary debates on Treaty partnership. The public square, where these debates are taking place, is the Church’s major mission field. The ministry work of the Church is contextual. If the Church is serious about its mission and ministry in Aotearoa New Zealand, then it cannot ignore contemporary Treaty debates. As recently as last year, the right-wing Coalition Government introduced the Treaty

Principles Bill into Parliament, a controversial Bill which attempted to rewrite and reinterpret the Treaty. Over 600 Church leaders supported an open letter to Parliament requesting that the Bill be not introduced into Parliament. Over 40,000 New Zealanders protested in the streets of the capital, Wellington. In this paper I venture beyond the church doors into the public square to examine briefly the political, economic and constitutional debates on Treaty partnership. I then view these debates through selected Māori theological perspectives.

Wayne Pomerleau, pomerleau@gonzaga.edu
“Loyalty and Disloyalty in the Context of Virtue and Vice”

Loyalty is typically considered a personal, political, and religious virtue, while disloyalty is regarded as a personal, political, and religious vice. Yet the ethics here is more complex than that. Loyalty to evil is not a virtue, and disloyalty can be virtuous if it involves loyalty to some conflicting value(s). When "loyalty" is carried to an extreme, it can become pathological partisanship, examples of which are readily identifiable, one of which is the trite example of the "loyal" Gestapo agent; at this point "loyalty" becomes vicious. My disloyalty towards a duly elected political leader may be due to my conflicting loyalty to the Constitution and the rule of law. In Charles Dickens' "Oliver Twist," the Artful Dodger's loyalty to Fagin's life of crime and corruption is horribly misguided and not at all virtuous.

In the area of religion, loyalty to religious institutions, doctrines, and practices can be dangerously fanatical (we might think of child sacrifice as an obligatory example). What of the Abraham story in the Book of Genesis (22:1-13)? Should Abraham's loyalty to his God allow for an obedient willingness to kill his beloved son, Isaac? Shouldn't a loyalty to ethics militate against belief in a God that would direct a person to do such an appalling thing? Is a deliberate disbelief in such a God in the name of morality not itself a virtuous matter of ethical principle? What is being argued here is that loyalty is not always a virtue and that disloyalty can itself be virtuous.

Finney Premkumar, University of Birmingham, finney.p@hotmail.com
“The Technological Singularity: Should We Redefine Religious Views of Human Uniqueness in the Context of Artificial General Intelligence?”

The singularity is a hypothetical future in which the scalability and exponential growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will supposedly yield a world of systems that display sentience or consciousness like human agents leading to the inevitable development of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). Will AGI, if developed, redefine human uniqueness often derived from religious doctrines and concepts such as consciousness/sentience, the soul, and notions like the Imago Dei? Regardless of the undeniable strides that AI research has achieved, I will present three arguments on why the development of AGI will never be possible regardless of increased technological complexity. First and foremost, I will maintain that complex AI systems will have human-level intelligence in the future but not human-like intelligence which is required for AGI. The subjective state experience of human-like intelligence seems only possible for conscious beings who seem to possess some level of transcendence (often discussed in various religious

traditions). Secondly, I will argue that the difference between humans and machines is not merely a difference in degree but a difference in kind (ontological). This ontological differentiation is something that is derived from religious doctrines and convictions. I will discuss the distinction by elaborating on the theological distinction between the 'Imago Dei' and the 'Imago Hominis.' Thirdly, I will explain how the syntactic and semantic distinction between machines and human persons highlights the qualitative nature resident in humanity, thereby providing an unbridgeable chasm between the former and the latter. I will argue that scalability and exponential growth being purely quantitative will never yield the semantic content made possible by human sentience and intentionality. I will conclude by providing an appreciative perspective of AI while sustaining fundamental religious doctrines about the nature and uniqueness of humanity.

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"The Diremption of Identity into Difference: Intellectualism and Voluntarism in Schelling's Philosophie und Religion"

Schelling's Identity Philosophy (1801-1804) synthesizes the bottom-up conception of the Absolute characteristic of his Nature Philosophy (1797-1799) with the top-down conception characteristic of his Transcendental Philosophy (1797-1800). But why does the Identity Philosophy in general, and the Philosophie und Religion (1804) in particular, prioritize the top-down approach? Which elements of this work prefigure the Freiheitsschrift's seemingly radical shift toward the bottom-up approach (1809)? I apply insights central to Tillich's Mysticism and Guilt-Consciousness in Schelling's Philosophical Development (1910)—where mysticism corresponds to Schelling's enduring conception of Identity (with the Absolute) and guilt-consciousness corresponds to human awareness of the split from original indifference into a "fallen" state of individuation—to Schelling's Philosophie und Religion (1804). My argument is that this text holds two senses of identity in tension: one intellectualist, which Tillich refers to as the Socratic conception of Identity, and one voluntarist, which Tillich refers to as the Augustinian conception. These two senses of Identity are reflected in the Philosophie und Religion's intellectualist (Neoplatonic) account of the necessary emergence of materiality from the absolute, on the one hand, and its voluntarist account of the impact of a will toward individuation, or freedom from God, in bringing about the fallenness of the material world. These two sides or aspects of Identity, in turn, generate the two sides of the solution that we find also present in the Philosophie und Religion: its (intellectualist) notion of intellectual intuition, and its (voluntarist) demand for moral purification. Whereas the more Neoplatonic Philosophie und Religion prioritizes the intellect over the will, even while elements of both senses of Identity are implicit throughout, a need to address the fallenness of the material world without equating evil with privation—as, it seems, is necessarily the case for any solely intellectualist, Neoplatonic account, like that of the Identity Philosophy more broadly (1801-1804)—will combine with the theosophical influence of Jakob Böhme to produce the bottom-up, almost wholly voluntarist approach of the Freiheitsschrift (1809). Applying Tillich's distinction between the Socratic (intellectualist) and Augustinian (voluntarist) senses of Identity, that is, reveals a central sense in which the Philosophie und Religion (1804) stands as a hinge

between the Neoplatonic intellectualism of the Identity Philosophy (1801-1804) and the radical voluntarism of the *Freiheitsschrift* (1809).

Bob Schmidt, Concordia University, robert.f.schmidt@comcast.net
“The Coming of the Kingdom and Political Change”

Social scientists, hedge fund executives, climatologists, and AI observers are talking about the possibility of a worldwide “system shift.” There is no agreement as to what will come next. The Hebrew prophets faced such a shift from the city-states of Samaria and Jerusalem to the imperial system of Assyria and the empires that followed. Walter Bruggemann describes how they dealt with it through tears (Lamentations) and visionary promises. Those promises were reflections of the time when God was King of Israel before the monarchy and pointed to the time when God would be King again. The tears of people in climate disasters, wars, and immigration calamities are already mobilizing people for change. World systems analyst Immanuel Wallerstein is now calling for “utopistic” goals. Though these are unlikely for the immediate present, they have the power to create an outline for our future. This presentation examines how the same promises of the prophets, realized in part with Jesus’ announcement of the Kingdom, may continue to provide a “utopistic” vision for the future.

Steve Studebaker, Trinity Western University, steve.studebaker@twu.ca
“The Spirit, Salmon, and People: A Theology of Reciprocal Relationality”

The creation stories in Genesis portray a common pneumatological foundation for life. From the people in Genesis 2 to the animals in Genesis 6 and 7, the breath or Spirit of God imbues the living creatures with life. When that life departs, the creatures, animal and human, return to the dust. Christian theology, however, often posits a fundamental discontinuity between human life and that of the rest of creation—e.g., because humans have a soul/spirit, bear the divine image. This attitude of uniqueness can foster a sense of superiority and neglect of the environment and even of people perceived as outside of the Christian community. The biblical creation stories, however, support a reciprocal view of the relationship between human beings and the rest of creation. Human difference does not mean discontinuity with the rest of creation. A reciprocal relationship based on the common source of life means that indifference toward other human groups and destructive practices toward the rest of creation violate the mutual sharing in the same Spirit of life. Put positively, human and environmental flourishing are inseparable. The New Testament accounts of the Spirit of Pentecost being for “all people” and the vision of the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22 support the solidarity of all human beings and the rest of creation. After the paper develops a theology of reciprocal relationality between human beings and all creation, it turns to a concrete example to illustrate the interconnectivity of people and creation. It discusses the history of the Columbia River and its dams and the degradation of indigenous communities, fish, and land.

**Tyler Tritten, Gonzaga University, tritten@gonzaga.edu
“Anne Conway on Middle Nature”**

Lady Anne Conway’s life overlapped almost exactly with Spinoza’s, although she was highly critical of Spinoza in addition to Descartes and Hobbes. It had been thought that her concept of the “monad” had influenced Leibniz. While it now appears more dubious that she was a forerunner of Leibniz’s conception of the monad, it is nevertheless evident that she exerted a great and, for Leibniz’s part, explicitly acknowledged influence on his philosophy. They both share 1) a non-mechanistic conception of force and 2) the insight that differences between substances are a matter of degree rather than kind.

In my presentation, I will provide an exposition of these two interrelated “proto-Leibnizian” theses, but I will argue that both these theses stem from her universalization of her christology. Conway exports the basic principle of her christology to her cosmology. Prima facie, it may appear that Conway does indeed draw a difference in kind between the substance that is God, the “middle” substance that is Christ, and the substance of creatures. However, the very fact that one of the most contested points in her philosophy amongst the secondary literature concerns whether she only affirmed one substance like Spinoza or many, whether in kind, like Descartes, or merely in number, like Leibniz, makes it clear that any substantial division between God, Christ and creatures cannot be as clean as may first appear. What can be said without debate is that she was critical of Cartesian dualism, which should at least give every reader pause to attribute to her any rigid separation between substances or kinds.

I will ultimately argue that her christology, which affirms Christ as a middle nature, is the key to unraveling the essence of her cosmology. If Christ, as middle nature, is not a third term between God and creatures but, instead, the first term through which all things were created and by which God first acquires any of the attributes that make him God – or, at least, a personal and loving one – then the being of God and the being of creatures are not distinct in kind from the middle nature of Christ. Conway’s cosmology operates from the middle out: spirit and matter are but the terminally possible extremes of a middle nature common to both, hence her claim that spirit is but rarefied matter and matter but condensed spirit and that the gross can become subtle and the subtle gross.

Religion and Society

David M. Gides, University of Providence, davidmgides@gmail.com

Joan Braune, Gonzaga University, braune@gonzaga.edu

Lars Stoltzfus, Gonzaga University, stoltzfus@gonzaga.edu

Joseph Flores, Gonzaga University, floresj@gonzaga.edu

Panel on book *On Christian Nationalism: Theological and Critical Perspectives* David M. Gides and Joan Braune discuss their forthcoming co-edited book, *On Christian Nationalism: Theological and Critical Perspectives* (Routledge 2025). Born partly out of a concern with the limitations of the quantitative, survey data-based, approach of leading sociologist experts on Christian nationalism, Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, the book by Gides and Braune

compiles chapters from a wide range of disciplinary approaches. The book demonstrates a need for understanding the threat posed by Christian nationalism with respect to historical, theological, and philosophical contexts. A wide range of authors (including Jemar Tisby, Drew Strait, Mobashra Tazamal, Eric Martin, and others) address intersections of Christian nationalism with race, gender, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other topics, as well as the complexity involved in applying a term designed as a critique by activists and social scientists, to groups that do not always identify with the term. Gides's presentation focuses on the rationale and contents of the volume, while Braune will present more specifically on the research in her chapter, which focuses on how and why some young Catholic fascist groups are overlooked in the research on "Christian nationalism" and how Christian nationalism does and does not intersect with Catholic authoritarian/hate groups.

Braune will present more specifically on the research in her chapter, which focuses on how and why some young Catholic fascist groups are overlooked in the research on "Christian nationalism" and how Christian nationalism does and does not intersect with Catholic authoritarian/hate groups. Finally, Flores and Stoltzfus will present on their co-authored paper about the "Christian nationalist power couple" Steven Anderson and Zsuzsanna Anderson. Using grounding theory and critical discourse analysis, Flores and Stoltzfus show how Steven and Zsuzsanna's juxtaposed strategies – Steven with his acerbic and sometimes violent preaching, speaking engagements, and church organizing efforts, and Zsuzsanna with a homeschool curriculum designed to appeal to young moms – coalesce and act to mirror the traditionalist marital and child-raising vision attributed to Christian nationalism.

Shihwa Hwang-Meza, KU Leuven, shihwa.hwang-meza@kuleuven.be

"God First, You Second, I Third: Theological Responses to Forced Ascription" VIRUTAL

"In this paper, I propose to explore the marginalization of "secular" individuals and religious minorities in the post-secular age. Secular individuals and religious minorities, particularly Muslims, are scapegoated for societal suffering. Mimetic theory explains how interpreted social failures, such as moral decline or terrorism, lead to marginalized groups being blamed as their cause. By scapegoating these individuals, society tries to simultaneously "expel" and "sacrifice" them to reinforce social cohesion.

The so-called "Christian right" in the US is a prime example of marginalizing both "secular" individuals and "Muslims." Secular individuals are often stereotyped as godless and blamed for eroding "traditional family values," while "Muslims" are collectively viewed as responsible for terrorism. These attitudes illustrate significant violence to an individual's identity. This negative ascription process not only stereotypes individuals but undermines their self-identity and personhood. For example, "secular" individuals who believe in God may be labelled "atheists" because they are not members of a recognized religious community, while other individuals are labelled as "Muslims" because of how they look or where they came from regardless of their beliefs or practices.

From a theological perspective, forced ascription directly contradicts the concept of personhood. Personhood like identity is realized through relationships with others and life experiences. When ascription is forced onto individuals, they are not simply marginalized but their personhood is fundamentally damaged. This disruption affects their ability to achieve human flourishing whether understood as fulfillment in this lifetime, the next, or none. Forced ascription is depersonalization and is thus an aberration to the Christian concept of the human person. By drawing on different theological anthropologies of the human person, I argue for the necessity of respecting self-identity and personhood from a Christian theological perspective. The personhood models of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Zizioulas and Stanley Hauerwas offer inclusive models that emphasize the primacy of self-identification. Ascribing belief systems or none to individuals constitutes a profound violation of their identity, personhood, and journey toward fulfillment.

Joseph Shou-Tao Liang, Regent College, dummyjoe610@hotmail.com

“Everyday Theology: When Taiwanese/Chinese Protestant Immigrant Families Meet Halloween.” VIRTUAL

"For first generation Taiwanese/Chinese immigrant families coming to North America, Halloween has always left them baffled: “Why would anyone want to dress up as ghosts and witches?” The presumption for the ancestor-worshipping Taiwanese/Chinese, who’ve only experienced mass transition from agrarian into urbanized societies within the past two generations, is that ghosts are no less than real, even if they’ve never had any supernatural experience. A Chinese saying goes “Better to believe it exists than to believe it doesn't.” “Why provoke spirits when one can appease them and avoid harm?” they would say. This becomes more complicated for Taiwanese/Chinese Protestant immigrant families trying to fit in. With all the negative connotations associated with the phenomenon that is Halloween—that it is a festival of the Devil, that it brings physical harm to children, that it has sexual implications, etc.—Taiwanese/Chinese Protestant parents are faced with a difficult choice of whether they should allow their children to participate in its celebrations. In this paper, rather than arguing for the need of “cultural literacy,” I devise a route of analysis in seeking a faith-appropriate response to understanding Halloween and hopefully initiate change.

Ascribing to Kevin Vanhoozer’s concept of “everyday theology” and a Reformed understanding of the cultural mandate (i.e., Richard Mouw,) I use Paul Ricoeur’s three-level discourse analysis rooted in speech act theory as an analogous multilayered framework of “general hermeneutics” providing “thick description” for cultural analysis. First, in “the world of the cultural text” (text/product,) I focus on and briefly describe the well-known phenomenon of trick-or-treating. Second, in “the world behind the cultural text” (author/producer,) I retrace the historical evolution of Halloween from the British Isles (Celtic, Catholic, and Anglican manifestations) to North America. Third, in “the world in front of the cultural text” (reader/consumer,) I explain the cultural and religious nuances of a Taiwanese/Chinese Protestant; then, use the three-step hermeneutic of “world building” proposed by Peter Berger to structure and objectivate all the historical findings: Halloween is paganly originated but have been intentionally alternated by the Catholic and Anglican Churches over hundreds of years. But for Taiwanese/Chinese

Protestants, the Chinese Ghost Festival, the Chinese Rites Controversy, and no doctrine of purgatory and payer for the deceased impede their understanding of its past Christian spirituality. The good news is that Halloween customs have been forever changing; Christians as co-creators in participation with God should externalize our marks in the everyday world.

**Levi Shiach, Regent College: Master of Arts in Theological Studies, levijshiach@gmail.com
 “Rediscovering Recovery: On the Myth of Addictedness and the Good News of the Twelve Steps” VIRTUAL**

"Twelve Step programs are held in church basements where groups of addicts gather together in order to confess and repent. The so-called 'un-addicted' meet in the church's groundfloor sanctuary the following morning for communion and worship. Both groups of people, I will argue in my paper, are in dire need of the spiritual freedom that the Twelve Steps offer. Of course, Twelve Step programs themselves are not what is needful; it is the spiritual principles that they disguisedly carry. As Franciscan priest Richard Rohr asserts, the wisdom of Twelve Step programs is inextricably linked to what St. Francis of Assisi called "the marrow of the Gospel."

Therefore, my paper will argue, in the tradition of addiction specialists like Gabor Maté (b. 1944) and Gerald May (1940–2005), that everyone is an addict. In order to demonstrate this, I will employ Kent Dunnington's (b. 1977) critique of the biomedical disease model for understanding addiction and propose, in its place, a model in which addiction is understood as a misapplication of our ineludible, God-given urge to worship. This, of course, calls to mind, perhaps unexpectedly, American novelist David Foster Wallace's (1962–2008) famous declaration, delivered on the occasion of his 2005 commencement speech for Kenyon College, that "there is no such thing as atheism [...] there is no such thing as not worshipping." And, indeed, my paper will propose, as Wallace did on multiple occasions, that addiction is a kind of religious impulse on display, a kind of worship of self and substance.

Moreover, my paper will argue that Twelve Step programs recognize and tend to our God-given urge to worship by promoting a deeply Gospel-influenced set of spiritual practices and principles, among them: surrender, humility, confession, prayer, and fellowship. Finally, my paper will argue that Christians and their churches should recognize and protect our wonderful urge to worship by recovering—and, indeed, devouring—the Twelve Steps' Gospel marrow."

**Jeff Cullen, Foundations for the Future Charter Academy, jcullen@shaw.ca
 “Maximus and the Singularity: An Exploration of Maximus the Confessors Theological Anthropology Applied to AI and Agency”**

This paper explores the theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor as a framework for engaging contemporary questions surrounding artificial intelligence and agency. In an era increasingly shaped by the rise of autonomous systems and the prospect of technological singularity, Christian theology is challenged to respond with categories that honor both divine transcendence and the unique dignity of the human person. Maximus presents the human being as a unifying synthesis of the cosmos: material and immaterial, finite and open to the

infinite, called to mediate creation's return to God through the proper exercise of will and the healing of the passions. This vision offers a profound alternative to prevailing secular narratives that frame artificial intelligence in terms of autonomy, efficiency, and emergent personhood. By focusing on Maximus's integration of agency and the passions, this presentation will consider how his vision of human teleology, rooted in ascetic struggle and synergistic participation in divine grace, might challenge assumptions about AI "consciousness" and moral capacity. The paper will argue that for Maximus, agency is not merely the capacity to choose, but the ability to will the good through the purification and transformation of desire. Considering this, the development of AI raises theological and ethical questions not only about what machines can do, but what it means to be truly human. Maximus thus provides a patristic lens for critiquing and reimagining the discourse around AI and the singularity in relation to personhood and agency.

**Bruce Hiebert, University Canada West, bruce.hiebert@ucanwest.ca
"Using AI Large Language Models to improve ethics: Six options"**

Ethics confronts us with wicked problems, problems that include contradictions, multiple answers, and incomplete solutions. In approaching these problems human beings use algorithms: simple structures of thought that break wicked problems into manageable units. The two most well-known algorithmic approaches are Deontology and Utilitarianism. Each provides a mathematical structure to the analysis of wicked problems. There are more such algorithms, most of which are embedded in what are called virtue ethics: hierarchical reasoning and identity reasoning. Ethical relativism itself is an algorithm of matching, a quest for the correct similarity of sets.

While there are many concerns that artificial intelligence (AI) creates new ethical problems, AI also offers humanity new tools for examining wicked problems and resolving them. Given that ethical reasoning is already algorithmic, it should not be surprising that computer-based tools can assist in the analysis of ethical problems. They have the possibility of doing so through two features of AI: the ability to interpret vast arrays of data, and the ability to analyze the data through the application of complex algorithms.

There are at least six ways in which AI can assist ethics based on these capabilities, some of which are currently available. However, there is potential in the existing LLMs to create completely new ways to approach moral problems. It is not a case where AI will replace human thinking but where, as human beings approach extremely difficult problems, they find a powerful tool that speeds decisions, provides them with more context, and improves the analytic capacity necessary for good decisions.

Justin Davis, Boise State University, justindavisphd@gmail.com

“Prohibiting the Free Exercise of Religion: Discrimination against Orthodox Christianity in Alaska” VIRTUAL

The First Amendment to the US Constitution states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Yet time after time the US has passed a series of laws with the express purpose of limiting the free exercise of Religion in the United States and its Territories. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century the United States, primarily through Protestant missionary, and U.S. Agent for Education Sheldon Jackson (1884-1905) and the Governor John Brady (1897-1906), used the force of the “American school” in an attempt to eradicate the religious and cultural beliefs of Inuit and Orthodox alike. Much like the forces of Ku Klux Klan on the Eastern Seaboard which prompted the rise of AHEPA (American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association), Orthodox Christians in America were attacked as being “not American.

While atrocities of the US government against native populations have been a topic for over fifty years, much of this attention has focused on the seizing of territory. Some attention has been drawn to the banning of the Ghost Dance by the US government in 1892, but little attention has been paid to how the US actively suppressed Orthodox Christianity among Natives and immigrants throughout the same time period, and how this legacy is affecting the exercise of Religion to this day.

This paper will address the early missionary movement of Russian Orthodox Christians into the Alaskan Territory, their success and then the result of American acquisition of Alaska and the subsequent persecution of religious life.

Women and Religion

Rachel Hanna, Regent College, MATS Student, rhanna@regent-college.edu

“Companions in Darkness: Understanding Thérèse of Lisieux and Mother Teresa from a Trauma Theology Perspective.” VIRTUAL

Spiritual darkness and its fruit can be seen in the lives of Thérèse of Lisieux and Mother Teresa. Both women have histories of early childhood loss, they take strict vows of chastity, obedience and poverty, and experience physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual affliction for much of their lives. Some researchers interpret Thérèse and Teresa’s experiences of darkness and doubt as 1) a ‘dark night of the soul’ (Clarke, 2019; Murray, 2008; Zagano and Gillespie, 2010), 2) clinical depression (Alpion, 2024; Coblenz, 2023; Williams, 2014), 3) separation anxiety and attachment trauma (Giugliano, 2004; Schneider, 2016; Vitz and Lynch, 2007), or 4) a legitimate response to the harsh realities of their respective vocations (Davies, 2019; Frohlich, 2000; Lösel, 2008; Keeley, 2021). By interpreting excerpts from *Story of a Soul* and *Come Be My Light* historically and through a trauma theology lens, I seek to understand these women’s spiritualities on their own terms and from the perspective of contemporary trauma survivors. In

particular, the curious connection between spiritual darkness and spiritualities of victimhood to Jesus requires reflection: should the abandoned respond by abandoning themselves to God, particularly in the form of vicarious suffering? Self-doubt, experiences of abandonment and guilt are key manifestations of complex trauma, which appear in their autobiographical writings. Thus, a trauma-informed reading is crucial in interpreting their comparative perspectives and responses to God. While Therese embraced Divine Mercy amid her trial of faith, Mother Teresa hid her suffering beneath a smile and encouraged others to do the same. Contemporary trauma theory would suggest that there may be other ways to respond and find healing, such as self-compassion, honesty, and embodied gentleness, and that adopting these postures is not just restorative for the individual, but also for the communities to which they belong.

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“When Faith Met Action: Incarceration and Incarnation at the Fresno County Jail.”

“It is good to see priests, nuns, seminarians and novices joining the pickets. They are getting a first-hand experience of what it means to work in the fields and what a long way the farm workers still have to go before they enjoy the benefits of the rest of our society.” (“Visits 76-Year-Old Matriarch,” *Detroit News*, 1973).

When, in August of 1973, Dorothy Day was arrested for picketing Gallo, she joined hundreds of other UFW workers and allies protesting the exploitation of agricultural labor, 42 of whom were women religious (*Pittsburgh Catholic* 10 August 1973). While Day had been at the fore of Catholic justice movements for decades, for many of the women involved in the protest, direct activism was new. The Fresno action, where so many sisters were arrested, stands as a watershed—where the activism and changes in the Roman Catholic Church preceding it, made possible the decision of women religious to violate a court injunction for the sake of Gospel justice, and their experiences of incarceration in the company of farm workers, fueled a commitment to justice, which they then brought back to their home communities.

Moving away from the restrictions that preceded the Sister Formation movement and the Second Vatican Council, by the time of the 1973 strike some religious were volunteering full-time with the UFW, and still others traveled to Fresno to volunteer to be arrested for the cause. This paper briefly addresses changes in that institutional Church that made such activism possible, and paints the lives of three Catholic women who went to Fresno to support the farm workers in their fight for justice: Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement; Sister María de Jesús Ybarra who answered the call to support those arrested, and; Sr. Carol Frances Jagen, who “chose to celebrate the feast of St. Ignatius with a day of solidarity with the farm workers,” and in doing so wound up spending two weeks in jail (Jagen, *National Catholic Reporter*, 31 August, 1973, CNS). Drawing on archival sources from the Reuther Labor Library, as well as the online Farm Worker Documentation Project, and the Catholic News Service, I map how the 1973 Fresno action is critical to understanding the changes Catholic Women’s communities underwent in the 1970s, and, in relation, changes in the ethos of the larger institutional Church.

Lily An Kim, Asia-Pacific Peace Museum, Dr.LilyKim@gmail.com

“Nursing Bridges for Healing: Canadian-Korean Relations in Indigenous Women's Perspective.”
VIRTUAL

From colonial to wartorn Korea, Canadian Evangelicals engaged in medical missions across the Pacific Ocean. Aboard ships that departed from the Port of Vancouver, the sacrificial language of “service” had been used to evaluate their motive and ministry. However, Canadians and the Korean women who disproportionately constituted a medical force and activism helped in transforming social landscapes, often while working outside of imperial metropolises. By contrasting the Korean mission and segregated/Indian hospital service, this paper uses the lens of cultural trauma or psychosocial recovery for discerning paths toward intercultural reconciliation. It examines the thousand Canadians, formerly ministering care overseas, and the lived reality of Korean women who collectively left profound imprints on a developing nation.

Emily Larsen, Regent College, emily.larsen13@gmail.com

“Minutes of the Breathing of God’s Spirit on Her Heart”: The Life, Spirituality, and Suffering of Sarah Pierpont.

The New England diarist, Sarah Pierpont (1710-1753) is virtually unknown in Early American Protestant history. Despite being related by marriage to Jonathan and Sarah Edwards and spending much of her adult life attending the high-profile revivalist meetings of figures such as George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent, very little is documented or known about her. The information that is available comes almost entirely from the one-hundred and thirty-seven-page manuscript, “Memoir of Mrs. Sarah Pierpont, 1756,” which was created at the request of Pierpont’s husband, James Pierpont Jr. (1699-1776). He asked their mutual friend, Ebenezer Parkman (1703-1782), a minister in Westborough Massachusetts, to compile and edit the memoir using Pierpont’s journals and letters, and to have it circulated after her death. The manuscript is currently archived in the “Parkman Family Papers, 1707-1879” collection of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.

With the exception of Parkman’s manuscript, several of his personal letters, and a few brief mentions in eighteenth-century scholarship, Sarah Pierpont—her life, faith, and impact—remains a mystery. Yet, much may be gleaned from these precious sources. This paper will explore the life of Sarah Pierpont, as preserved in the valuable manuscript, “Memoir of Mrs. Sarah Pierpont, 1756,” thereby enlarging our understanding of the religious lives of women in colonial New England. Like many of her female contemporaries, Pierpont’s journals not only preserved the lay individual’s account of God’s providence in everyday experiences, but it also gave instruction and provided hope for future readers struggling with difficult trials and the suffering of life. With special attention will be given to her experience of chronic illness and the impact it had on her faith and understanding of God, my hope is that readers will not only be introduced to Sarah Pierpont and edified by her remarkable life, but also that they will be transported back to the world of eighteen-century America, “a world that has much to say to

our own.” (Quote from Catherine A Brekus, *Sarah Osborn’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

Selena Madden, Independent Scholar, selena.madden@gmail.com

“Embodying the Feminine Warrior: Martial Arts, Elemental Forces, and Spirit.”

The way of the warrior is inseparable from the rhythms of nature. Each strike carries the grounded weight of the earth, unyielding yet alive. Each shift flows like water, adaptive and unstoppable. Fire blazes in the clarity of purpose; air moves with the whispering precision of breath. Spirit weaves these forces together—a luminous thread binding all creation.

In the martial arts traditions of China, Japan, and the Philippines, the movements are prayers in motion, channeled through archetypal energies of feminine deities who embody Earth’s sentient wisdom. The Chinese White Crane style flows with the grace of Guanyin, goddess of compassion, whose fluidity mirrors water’s adaptability and air’s whispering truth. Japanese naginata carries the fierce yet balanced energy of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, illuminating transformation and harmony. In the Philippines, the moon goddess Mayari inspires Eskrima, where the interplay of earth, air, and spirit embodies cycles of justice, renewal, and equilibrium.

These traditions are not merely physical disciplines; they are spiritual practices, sacred rituals of reciprocity between the human body and the living Earth. The feminine warrior archetype does not dominate; she listens, collaborates, and moves in harmony with the cycles of creation. Her dance is a conversation with the elements, an honoring of the sacred balance that sustains life.

The warrior’s spirit is one of fierce compassion—a force that protects, nurtures, and transforms. She calls us to heal the split between spirit and body, intuition and action. Martial arts, seen through these lenses, become a sacred bridge, where the archetypal feminine reveals the wisdom of the sentient Earth through embodied practice.

This presentation explores the intersection of mythology, ecology, and spiritual practice in martial arts traditions. It invites us to consider how the feminine warrior archetype offers a path of sacred alignment—one that honors the Earth’s rhythms, nurtures the spirit of interconnection, and deepens our understanding of what it means to be fully human in a living, breathing world.

Anna Nowland, Independent Scholar, Spokane, WA, anowland@zagmail.gonzaga.edu

“Dorothy Day and Kierkegaard’s Stages of Existence: The Modern “Mother of Faith.”

The life and activism of Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, embodies each of Kierkegaard’s three stages of existence, especially the movement into the religious. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard’s original example of Abraham sets an initial standard of faith in the face of the absurd. However, the paradoxical transcendence of the ethical in this particular example, when Abraham is commanded by God to kill his son, leads to

contention among readers. Despite his description as the “father of faith,” an exemplary model of the “knight of faith,” plenty of people believe Abraham should not have attempted to kill his son regardless of God’s command. Instead of viewing it as a step closer to God, it’s viewed as a descent into madness and makes the full subjective path unattractive to pursue if these types of commands would be made. The transcendence of the ethical is inherently difficult to grasp fully through the stories of others given its personal, subjective nature. The Long Loneliness, Dorothy Day’s memoir, gives insight into a first hand account of the movement from aesthetic to ethical, with her shift from a witness of injustice with a more shallow grasp on faith turning into a genuine, deep love of the masses. Eventually, she is called by God to make a leap of faith into the religious stage for her cause. The nurture of humanity told in the story of Dorothy Day, the “mother of faith,” allows for deeper understanding adds a different layer to Kierkegaard’s work than the emphasized discipline in faith through the “father of faith,” Abraham. Day’s sustained commitment to the religious stage in her transformed love makes her a model of a true “knight of faith,” emerging from the everyday.

**Melissa Porter, Independent Scholar, porter.melissanicole@gmail.com
 “#MeToo Christology: A Feminist Christology of Wounds and Resistance.”**

This is a constructive Christology for women who have experienced sexual trauma. I begin by locating the context and important distinct characteristics of the MeToo movement: Solidarity, Witness, and Justice. I frame this project in trauma theory and theology by drawing on a trauma theorist Judith Herman’s model of trauma recovery: Establishing safety, Remembering and Grieving, and Reintegration. These trauma recovery stages are then applied to the church in order to argue that establishing safety means deconstructing harmful theologies that have caused more harm to women who have experienced abuse. And lastly, I connect the remembering/grieving concept back to the MeToo movement to ground my conceptualization of Eucharist by reintegrating a new conception of resurrection and healing modeled in Christology. By applying the themes of the MeToo movement and their relative stages of trauma recovery, I will assess Jesus’ participation in abuse as both a victim and a survivor.

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 “Sudden Turns Towards Freedom: Eucatastrophes in Sara Coleridge’s Phantasmion.”**

Sara Coleridge (1802-1852) was a poet, critic, translator, and theologian whose work has largely been obscured by her status as the chief posthumous editor of her father, the English Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). She wrote on topics as far ranging as Victorian concepts of beauty, anxiety, education, literature, and the burgeoning Oxford Movement. Coleridge is also notable for authoring what some have called the first English fantasy novel, *Phantasmion* (1837).

Since its publication, there have been questions around whether *Phantasmion* has any meaning or moral purpose. Discussions around its interpretation, such as those by Dennis Low and Hilary Newman in the “The Coleridge Bulletin,” focus on its intertwining love stories. The purpose of

my paper is to examine *Phantasmion* as a fairy story by reading it through the interpretive lens set out by J. R. R. Tolkien in his seminal lecture, "On Fairy Stories." In his lecture, Tolkien claims that "eucatastrophe," or a sudden turn towards the good in the midst of hopelessness, is the essence of a true fairy story. Eucatastrophe finds its essence in the gospel narrative, where Christ's resurrection after the crucifixion is the greatest turn towards the good of all. Although Coleridge's novel was written a century before Tolkien delivered his lecture, I argue that his hermeneutic applies to and illuminates *Phantasmion* in new ways.

Although *Phantasmion* centres on a prince of the same name, it features an array of women in its supporting cast of characters. Many, if not all, of these women are trapped, bound, or cursed in some way. Iarine, the primary love interest, is bound to marry whoever holds an enchanted pitcher. Oloola, a fairy of storms, is enslaved to the will of a wicked king. The eucatastrophe of *Phantasmion* is a sudden release for the women of the story from whatever curse it is—whether magical or societal—that keeps them enthralled. Read this way, the sudden turn towards the good, or gospel hope, of Sara Coleridge is one of autonomy for women like herself, an impulse that was subversive perhaps even in the context of her own, more explicitly conservative, critical writing.

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