

Oxford Symposium on Religious Studies Proceedings

Presenter: Doha Abdelgawad

Title: The Transcendental and the Political: The Secular Dilemma in the Narratives of the Muslim Brotherhood Members.

Abstract: Is an Islamic modern polity attainable? How is it perceived, and how is possible to accommodate a transcendental reference within political modern structures? This study examines those questions through the narratives of 48 members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. With a reference to a growing literature on the notion of secularism and post Islamism, the article examines two critical issues that are at the heart of the debate over the secularization of Islamists: 1) the stance towards the state's legal intervention limits in the personal sphere. 2) the notion of popular sovereignty, and the transcendental reference of the state. In contrast with a body of literature that perceives Islamists instrumentally as secular agents, the article argues Islam/religion is a faithfully perceived determinant element in defining societal morality and limiting a state's secular sovereignty

Presenter: Renata Santos Beman

Title: The Transcendental and the Political: The Secular Dilemma in the Narratives of the Muslim Brotherhood Members.

Abstract: This short project explores the dimension of assistive technologies' use of IVF 'designer baby' preposition, towards social derogative perception creation of disabled people, in this case, the blind and visually impaired. IVF promotes the idea of providing families and individuals with ""perfect design babies"", a possible promise for a future where individuals with a disability might not stand a chance, a reality that brings to the surface many ethical and moral issues regarding how we see each other, build prejudices towards venerable groups and foresee the origins of our existence or when human life begins.

The primary idea of this project was inclusive by welcoming the blind and visually impaired into the bioethics technologies and procreation debate to consider a new perspective from the other side of the coin, of those that are not directly impacted but find themselves a central part of the debate, after all, there is growing silenced discussion if whether or not science can decide if an individual (able or disabled) has rights to be a member of its species. With a social-behavioural perspective, a questionnaire was developed on a five-point Likert scale; 23 questionnaires were successfully analysed. Besides, two video interviews with a became blind artist and born blind writer and linguist are presented as both were keen to express their support for the importance of further research.

Presenter: Michael Daise

Title: Culture Wars and the First Christian Martyrdom

Abstract: In her celebrated book *The Myth of Persecution* Candida Moss made clear to a wider public that Roman maltreatment of early Christians was more "prosecution" than "persecution", and that such prosecution was provoked as much by Christian political, social and cultural conduct as it was by its theology. "When Christians appeared in Roman courtrooms", she writes,

they were not tried as heretics, blasphemers, or even

fools. Christians had a reputation for being socially reclusive, refusing to join the military, and refusing to swear oaths. Once in the courtroom Christians said things that sounded like sedition. They were rude, subversive, and disrespectful. More important, they were threatening.

In a Judaic key the same holds for what is considered the very first Christian martyrdom, the execution of Stephen in Acts 6-7. As Moss herself is aware, the animus in that event was not Jewish against Christian, but intra-Jewish, antagonism from the "Synagogue of the Freedmen". And though Luke casts the incident as an assault on Stephen's christological faith, cues from the wider narrative, from Jerusalem archeology and from contemporaries such as Josephus and Philo betray it in fact to have occurred in the crucible of a culture war between "Hellenists" and "Hebrews", exacerbated by political aggression against Jews in Alexandria and Rome.

This paper sketches such complexity, with a view toward appreciating the nuanced milieu in which Christianity emerged and uncovering a more realistic vector for contemporary imitatio Christi."

Presenter: Miloš David

Title: The Significance of Martyrdom in Coptic Spirituality

Abstract: The Coptic Church is generally called the Church of Martyrs. Martyrdom has played a major role in Coptic Spirituality for almost two thousand years. My research is based on Christian primary sources such as Early Christian writings or lives of saints and secondary sources from Coptic ecclesiastical milieu which reflect the notion of Martyrdom and so that way helps new generations of Copts to understand this phenomenon in their spiritual life. Owing to my frequent journeys to Egypt I can draw much information on talks with Copts about this issue. The cult of martyrs is ubiquitous, especially in a calendar of martyrs which accompanies believers during the whole liturgical year.

Presenter: Grisel d'Elena

Title: The Rohingya of Arakan: Regional Geopolitics, and Ethnicity, Race, and Religion in Myanmar

Abstract: This paper sheds light on how the four factors of race, religion, ethnicity, and the permissibility of regional geopolitical actors have produced one of the most flagrant human rights atrocities against the Muslim Rohingya people in Myanmar. Despite the accelerating waves of displacement over the past three decades, the plight of the Rohingya has been underreported. The military coup of 2021 coupled with the geopolitics of Myanmar, including the support of China and Russia in the region impacted both the stateless Rohingya and Myanmar's citizens by producing international permissibility as we have seen with Chechens and Uighurs in the past.

Presenter: Amani Elshimi

Title: Education for 'Spiritual Felicity': A Critical Discourse Analysis of al-Ghazālī's The Criterion of Action

Abstract: Exploring how an Islamic worldview anchors the Muslim perception of education and knowledge, this study examines al-Ghazali's "The Criterion of Action" – a seminal Arabic work by the renowned Islamic thinker of the late eleventh century. While various studies have analyzed Islamic education, few have looked at the concept through the lens of linguistic devices that reflect worldview. The analysis is supported by Norman Fairclough's framework for Critical Discourse Analysis to shed light on the socio-cultural context, attitudes, power dynamics, and other factors that are shaped by the Islamic worldview and that, in turn, influence knowledge and education.

Presenter: Aaron Gale

Title: Theodicy, the Devil, and the Bible: The Judeo-Christian Evolution of Evil

Abstract: This paper explores the evolution of theodicy, evil, and the Devil from a Judeo-Christian perspective. Methodologies utilized in this study include biblical-critical methods (e.g., Josh 6:8; Isa 10.20; Matt 4.8-9) and literary analyses of other Jewish sources such as 1 Enoch, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Talmud (b. Ber.6; b. Meg. 3a; et al.). The aim of this presentation is twofold: to confirm that concepts such as the Devil and Hell were never adopted into normative Judaism, and to prove that despite the above assertion, Christian understandings of evil and the Devil evolved primarily through Jewish influence.

Presenter: Mohammad Amir Hakimi Parsa

Title: Inscribing Islamic Unity under an Imperial State: The Eighteenth-Century Turkish Inscription on the Imam Ali Shrine

Abstract: For those who have been to the Imam Ali Shrine in the Iraqi city of Najaf, the monumental inscription across the shrine's arched gateway (iwan) might be puzzling at first glance. Although the script is Arabic, the language is not; Nor is it Persian. The inscription is in fact a Turkish poem composed by a court poet in the service of the eighteenth-century Iranian conqueror, Nader Shah. This paper analyses how this poetic inscription, which has hitherto received scant attention from scholars and laymen alike, formed part of a wider religio-imperial discourse by Nader Shah who was attempting to usurp the Ottoman caliph as the leader of the Islamic world. The inscription shows that Nader connected his imperial mandate to the sacral authority of Ali b. Talib, regarded by Shias as the first of the Twelve Imams and by Sunnis as the last of the Four Rightly-Guided (Rashidun) Caliphs after the Prophet. The paper argues that the inscription forms part of Nader's efforts to speak to both Shia and Sunni subjects, and present himself as a form of universal sovereign over the Islamic world. The themes of the inscription shall be analysed in the context of Nader's religious reform movement of Ja'farism and the ecumenical council he held in Najaf in 1743, attended by Shia and Sunni ulema from across his vast empire. The Arabic writings of these ulema shall be put in dialogue with the writings of the Ottoman and Iranian state officials who also participated in, or bore witness to, the council's proceedings. In this way, I hope to give a nuanced account of how Nader's imperial state articulated its programme for unifying the Islamic world through different mediums, including monumental epigraphy and ecumenical councils.

Presenter: Laura Hamilton Hui

Title: The Value of Majority-world Contextual Hermeneutics for Western Biblical Interpreters with Examples from Asian and Asian American Perspectives

Abstract: "While the majority of known Christian scholarship has developed in the West, now God's Word is being interpreted by readers from contexts around the world. As Western interpreters, it would be a mistake to assume that these majority-world interpretations will match our own; instead, these interpreters are often reading the Bible contextually, using their own cultural contexts to illuminate elements of the biblical text. In this paper, I first discuss contextual hermeneutics as a model that describes the reality of any biblical interpretation and propose a new diagram to visualize the model. Then, I develop the metaphor of fish tanks to describe the benefit of learning from these majority-world contextual interpretations for the Western reader, proposing three benefits in particular: (1) Insights into Biblical Culture and Truth, (2) The Removal of Cultural Blinders in Our Applications, and (3) A Return to Interestedness and Accessibility in Scholarship. Finally, I provide three examples of elements within the biblical context that can be better understood by listening to Asian and Asian American interpretations: (1) Family and Community, (2) Shame, and (3) Harmonious Dichotomies.

My research interacts with Te-Li Lau's *Defending Shame* (2020), Elizabeth Mburu's *African Hermeneutics* (2019), Chin Ming Stephen Lim's *Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics as Multicentric Dialogue* (2019), K. K. Yeo's *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing* (1998), and C. René Padilla's "The Interpreted Word: Reflections on Contextual Hermeneutics" (1981) among others.

Presenter: Mason Lee

Title: Bearing Reality: Towards Pastoral Theology in Light of the Apostles' Creed

Abstract: The challenge of much pastoral theology in our present age is theological in nature. This paper argues for a theological response to our contemporary religious moment by grounding a vision of pastoral theology in the most basic Christian confession: The Apostles' Creed. When viewed as a confession for the practice of ministry, the Apostles' Creed discloses a theological vision of ministry as "bearing reality." As a "reality bearer" the work of the minister is to witness – through every act of ministry - to God's reconciliation of the world to God's self in Jesus Christ. By confessing the Apostles' Creed, the minister commits themselves to a vision of reality shaped and determined by God's love, provision, and activity. This, in turn, grounds pastoral identity, clarifies ministerial vocation, and protects ministerial burnout. As a paper occurring at the intersection of pastoral and systematic theology, this paper engages the Apostles' Creed as an interpretive lens for developing a pastoral theology.

Presenter: Michael MacKay

Title: Design Theory and Interfaith Leadership and Ethics

Abstract: This paper uses the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber to theorize about how to design a course on Interfaith Leadership and Ethics. What is at stake, is the struggle between an ethics of pedagogy and the practical outcomes of interfaith leadership. Framed within the rich literature about Levinas and education, this article explores the tension between the pedagogical relationship of the teacher and student, while also thinking through the design issues for the course that emphasize the relationship between an individual and the other, in interfaith dialogue. This paper will argue for the value of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of education and its implications for pedagogical design but also struggle over

whether Levinas goes far enough for interfaith engagement by contrasting Martin Buber's philosophy of I and Thou. In conclusion, this paper will offer one possible solution by way of an ethnographic methodology that exhibits the value of Buber's philosophy.

Presenter: Moshe Maoz

Title: The Abraham Accords: Religion and Politics; Israel, Iran, Palestinians, and Muslims

Abstract: analyzing Israeli vision and objectives in advancing the Abraham accords (sept. 2020) with UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan (pending) to more Arab and Muslim nations - "from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia". This, essentially to confront Iran's strategic threat by a new "Arab Nato" with Israeli and American help, as well as to cut the Gordian knot between the Palestinian problem and Israel's peace with Arab and Muslim states..

Presenter: Kevin Allen Marshall

Title: Code-Switching Across Rhetorical Figures: A Survey of Malcolm X's Rhetoric from Oxford to Harlem

Abstract: One of the more curious features of Malcolm X's intellectual life has been his relationship with the arts of logic and rhetoric/composition. Both Malcolm's mother and father, Louise and Earl Little, were boldly literate organizers for the Garvey Movement in the wake of the Red Summer of 1919 which saw over thirty white-led lynch mob massacres across the United States. In fact, the former was a high school-educated reporter for Marcus Garvey's newspaper, Negro World. Indeed, the young Malcolm imbibed a love for language early in life, as was also evidenced in his childhood dream of becoming a lawyer. However, some years after his father's assassination at the hands of a Klan-like terrorist organization, his dropping out of junior high school, and his subsequent years in the streets far removed from nobler pursuits, Malcolm rediscovered his love for the arts of language in prison. It was there that he wrote out an entire collegiate dictionary by hand, participated in a prison debate club organized by volunteer teachers from institutions such as Harvard and Boston universities, and attentively studied just about every book on history, religion, and the social sciences his prison's rather impressive library had to offer. This shift between the unique education of his upbringing and that of the streets, as well as his self-directed education in the applied liberal arts behind bars, formed the backdrop upon which Malcolm's application of the arts of dialectic and rhetoric would be set during his subsequent years as an activist and public intellectual. As such, utilizing the "classical methods" of rhetorical analysis, this paper argues that Malcolm X, as a matter of standard rhetorical practice, both skillfully code-switched across, and within, numerous rhetorical figures in his discursive appeals to the logos, ethos, and pathos of various audiences irrespective of the occasion.

Presenter: Kai Parker

Title: African American Religion and the Problem of Interpretive Tradition in Religious Studies

Abstract: This research asks how the study of religion can transcend the tendency to value religions by their claims to (preferably written) traditions of interpretation. This tendency has presented a problem for the study of U.S. Black religion because of how transatlantic racial slavery disrupted African interpretive traditions and communities of practice while preventing the enslaved from writing. Reading nineteenth-century first-person accounts of the religion of

enslaved people, this paper finds that the enslaved created less an alternative hermeneutics of liberation than a challenge to how the valorization of interpretive tradition itself can sustain racial subordination and hierarchies of religious classification.

Presenter: Melanie Rae Perez

Title: The Women's Burden: Iranian Theocracy & the Case of Mahsa Amini

Abstract: Iran, an important nation on the geopolitical stage due to its location and natural resources, has proven to be an increasingly volatile in recent decades. Its current authoritarian theocratical government has sparked outrage from both Iranians and external observers alike, as consistent oppression and other human rights violations continue to dominate the nation's authority. The recent murder of the young Kurdish-Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, has inspired vast protests across the country, which have been consistently met with human rights violations per government response. Far from being an anomalous event, Amini's death has been viewed as the culmination of decades of oppression of Iranian women, representing a crossroads for both Iran and the Middle East. This presentation offers a comprehensive examination of Iran's history and religious doctrine that has created and upheld the authoritarian theocracy, uncover how the regime has manipulated Islam to assert power, and lastly connect the mistreatment of women that ultimately led to death of Mahsa Amini and push back of the protests that have followed as violations of human rights and international law.

Presenter: Richard Pring

Title: Religious Formation in a Secular Society

Abstract: Religious Education is one of the most controversial aspects of the educational system. One is seeing therefore its steady decline (facts and figures given) - no longer in the curriculum of many secondary schools. This paper reflects this decline in an increasingly secular society (which is described). But the paper argues for a renewed focus on a place for the formation of a distinctively religious understanding and appreciation of what it means to be human.

Presenter: Heidi Ravven

Title: Has the History of Anti-Semitic Group Ritual and Group Identity During the Holocaust Anything to Teach Us About Sexual Assault on Campus and How to Prevent It?

Abstract: An analysis of the literature on sexual assault on campus exposes: 1. The inculcation of sexual violation as a group norm and the normalization of violence through fraternity and other group rituals; 2. The symbolic inducement and engagement of intense group identity so that the group becomes the actor as much as the individual; and 3. A pattern of deception and denial within the group and the collusion of the broader community. Many of the features of the development and performance of symbolic group identity have precedents and analogies in the Nazi Holocaust especially with the SS and its quasi-religious, mythic, symbolic culture. Studies of Nazi perpetrators and the Nazification of German society are introduced to set in stark relief the phenomenology of perpetration and to offer insight into strategies of prevention.

Presenter: (Mary) Huong Mai Xuan Tran

Title: A Cultural and Religious Approach to Explore the Inextricable Link between Self-love and Self-sacrifice

Abstract: The practice of self-sacrifice is often considered both the loss of the self and the gift of the self for the goodness of others. This paradoxical expression of self-sacrifice invites a deep understanding of its meaning concerning quotidian self-sacrifice. The quotidian self-sacrifice is often, if not always, attributed to female characteristics by which women unconditionally give themselves for the good of their families. It visibly holds up the idea that women who deny their own desires and expectations are given gifts for others. In other words, self-sacrifice is part of womanhood as it manifests in the mindset of those who adhere to the Confucianist heritage culture. Providing that self-sacrifice was the denial of self-love, women would have no space for their dignity and self-respect when they continually sacrifice for others for the sake of a self-sacrificial act rather than the agents. Hence, it should critically revisit the concept of self-sacrifice in the Confucianist culture, where females are subordinate to males. Notably, a socially prescribed tradition of self-sacrifice is honoured as female virtue in the Vietnamese context. The traditional view likely venerates the excessive sacrifice of female beings for a good and harmonious family or community. Nonetheless, morally speaking, whatever is excessive or deficient would not be considered a virtue. As a result, this paper aims to sketch an extricable link between self-sacrifice and self-love, which is particularised from the Christian command - love your neighbours as yourself (Mt 22:39). From a cultural and religious discourse, it will develop into three aspects: (1) self-sacrifice for the sake of the self, (2) the intrinsic value of self-sacrifice that oriented towards the prospective good, (3) the equal-regard and mutual self-sacrifice.

Presenter: Lisa Verner

Title: Sexual Assault and Victim Blaming: Analyses from the Church Fathers and a Tenth-century Nun

Abstract: "Consider an ominous and depressingly stable statistic: approximately 20% of all women in college will be sexually assaulted at some point during their higher education career.† As a Confidential Advisor and Director of the Women's Center at the University of New Orleans, I am well aware of the prevalence of sexual assault. Even today as #MeToo makes significant progress in shifting the shame and blame of sexual assault from the victim to the perpetrator, the practice of victim blaming remains common. This is true at universities generally and at Christian schools particularly, as cases at Bob Jones University* and Brigham Young University^ illustrate. Victim blaming derives from patriarchal culture, and victims' rights advocates often point, with some justification, towards the Christian church's preoccupation with female sexual purity. We must ask, has the Christian church always considered the sexually violated woman to be impure? Is victim blaming inherent in Christianity itself? This paper will look at the late antique/early medieval debate regarding spiritual purity among victims of rape. The church fathers had strong opinions on this issue, but they were not in agreement. This study will also consider the 10th-century nun Hrosvitha of Gandersheim's play, ""The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agape, Chionia, and Hirena,"" as a Christian woman's contribution to the discussion concerning the nature and importance of virginity, especially as regards rape victims. A close reading of these sources will show a divergence of attitudes regarding the spiritual condition

ascribed to survivors of sexual assault and document alternative ways of evaluating spiritual and sexual purity.

Presenter: Shea Watts

Title: Dancing in the Spirit: Exploring Pentecostalism at the Interarticulations of Affect and Ritual

Abstract: "Theories of affect and ritual studies, in conversation, provide a history and open-ended, multifaceted framework for exploring religious experience in the dynamism of the worship space. The complementarity and adjacency of theories of affect and ritual studies demonstrates the ways in which these theories coalesce, the ways that theory can bend, be inverted, and stretched beyond Cartesian anxiety that renders bodies as bifurcated halves of mind/body. Through their interarticulation, we can theorize via affect and ritual in the interstices of what remains just out of reach of cognition and language, complementing and augmenting other ongoing approaches to Pentecostalism. Affect draws attention to the extra-linguistic cues, feelings, and forces that shape and orient bodies in space, while ritual observes and explores the choreographic languages of the body.

In this essay, I propose an approach that engages Pentecostal worship experiences in all its gestural, visceral, and corporeal potential, its paradoxical nuances, its messy ecstatic outbursts, ruptures, performances, contradictions. Pentecostal permutations potentially undermine the conventions and traditions of the spiritual practices of Pentecostal worship, itself. While this approach is not fully sufficient to attend to the boisterous potential of Pentecostal worship, it does center the body as the locus of spiritual practice and interpretation. Embracing Pentecostal experiences means accepting that no one methodology can capture, convey, or tame it. Nevertheless, embracing an interdisciplinary approach is helpful to explore these languages of the body in their choreographic and extra- and para-linguistic manifestations.

"Dancing in the Spirit" opens the door to an interdisciplinary conversation between theories of affect and ritual studies to explore Pentecostal worship experience as an occasion of bodies being pushed and pulled by affective rituals."

Presenter: Kirk Wegter-McNelly

Title: Engaging Hypotheticals: Groundwork for the Theological Study of Religious Ideas in a Secular Academic Context

Abstract: In the secular academy the "religious studies" approach aims to situate religious ideas within their socio-historical context, privileging the cornucopic variety of lived religion over more systematized expressions of religious thought. In the theological academy this larger context often takes a back seat to confessional theological explication. One possibility elided by this dichotomy is the non-confessional theological study of religious ideas within a secular context. This paper considers the possibility of analyzing religious ideas from a secular theological perspective as hypotheses akin to those of science. The argument hinges on the notion that not all hypotheses worth considering are testable.

Presenter: Charles A. Wilson

Title: Revising Jefferson's View of Jesus

Abstract: In his final years Thomas Jefferson sought to recover the “real” Jesus in *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (LMJN). My paper undertakes an immanent reading of the text with methods developed in Jesus Research; it analyzes the LMJN from within his cut-and-paste method and discovers a new picture of his Jesus. Jefferson’s Jesus displaces the biblical story of Jesus into a crusade against the hypocritical morality of the leaders of Second Temple Judaism. Meanwhile, Jefferson’s editing provides a robust, if not traditional, theology and a christology of the Shepherd-Sage who performs his death for Wisdom.