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Abstracts

Katzenelson's Theology of Despair

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Monotheistic religions have created long traditions of theodicy, which reconcile between the basic premises of Monotheism and the hardships of historical reality. If everything that happens is part of a God-guided history, then why there are so much pain in the world? Why bad things happened to good people?

The Holocaust of the Jewish people stretched Jewish theodicy to its limits. While traditional thinkers would claim that the problem of evil is not new to Jewish thought, others would claim that the "Shoa" is a scandal that tradition can no longer explain away. It is so compelling that it shatters all traditional Jewish formulas. As Wiesel put it, "There were among us those to whom the Holocaust appeared as a new Mount Sinai -- a Mount Sinai of darkness." (Wiesel, 1970, 86)

This paper will represent the end of Jewish theodicy in the Holocaust year's writings of Itzhak Katzenelson (1885 – 1944 Auschwitz), a gifted Bible teacher, poet and dramatist, known as "the mourner of the Holocaust."

Katzenelson was a literary witness to the realities of the Shoa. In the beginning, using Biblical language, he tried to offer consolation for the population of the Warsaw Jewish ghetto. However, as death became the dominant reality, his writings became darker. A close reading of his last writings, which outlived its author, reveals a ladder of despair, which takes us down to the abysses of history.

Finally, in his most important poem, "The Song of the Murdered Jewish People", written towards the end of 1943 in the concentration camp of Vittel, France, Katzenelson becomes a prophet of despair. Theodicy collapses. Providence is now the great deception of Monotheism. The heavens are empty. In the face of ultimate evil, the world lost its meaning. On April 1944, Katzenelson was deported to Auschwitz and murdered.

A Theology for Social Engagement

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George Whitefield and Johnathan Edwards owned slaves. Charles Hodge supported slavery and many modern Evangelicals are behaving in ways complicit with white supremacy and other forms of social injustice. What is inadequate about the theology represented by these Christians driving their complicity with social injustice? The paper will argue that residuals of legalism remain imbedded in the syntax of classic Evangelical theology which has led to a strong individualistic and hegemonic worldview. These theological arrangements make it difficult to conceptualize a true multicultural community. The paper will begin with an examination of the

role of the Law in the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and the New Covenants as viewed by Reformation and Post-Reformation theology and by some key modern Evangelical theologians. It will also study church confessions starting with Luther's 95 thesis forward to the Westminster Confession. The paper will make the argument that Reformation and Post-Reformation theologies' understanding of the Law's role has informed them to view the doctrine of justification held by the 2nd Temple Jew as a works system. This has resulted in a particular definition of justification and salvation. It has also informed theologians to believe that the Apostle Paul's hermeneutical lens was primarily soteriological and that he argued in the letters to the Romans and Galatians to correct the Jew's faulty works system.

The paper will suggest the use of several hermeneutical points of view offered by the New Perspective on Paul and N.T. Wright which will help Evangelicals embrace a more socially friendly theological arrangement. This theological arrangement can encourage Evangelicals to adopt an approach to social engagement that will be more helpful to the Christian civil society.

A Divided Discourse: The Use of Walls and Religious Doctrine in the Politics of Fear

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In the United States, the issue of immigration is a dominant topic of conversation. The Trump administration's policy changes have created a situation in which people from Muslim majority countries have been barred from entering the country, children have been separated from their parents, and families seeking asylum have been detained, potentially indefinitely. Individuals from the executive and legislative branches have cited parts of the Bible as moral justification (and in some cases moral requirements) for these policies and actions. This is part of a pattern of behavior by certain parties to utilize fear in order to push forward policy agendas while circumventing direct responsibility. This paper focuses on the historical and contemporary use of "walls," both figurative and literal, to create and perpetuate a culture of fear in regards to immigrants. Literal walls include both human-made walls and natural barriers such as deserts and mountains. Figurative walls include laws, executive actions, and fear inducing and differentiating rhetoric. The idea of building a physical wall along the southern border was a linchpin of the Trump campaign, and continues to be a vital part of the administration's rhetoric. There has been much debate among Christian communities about whether the building of said wall is in line with the teachings of the faith. Religious belief is often central to personal identity. Religious doctrine and language intended to induce fear can be highly activating. Fear often causes people to crave security, to keep "us" in and "others" out. This paper analyzes Biblical texts, religious doctrine, speech transcriptions (by both religious leaders and politicians), and policy language in order to shed light on the issue.

“A Place Where Fiction Becomes More Important Than Reality”: The Human Will-To-Violence and Literature as a Tool for Reconciliation in Miljenko Jergović’s Sarajevo Marlboro

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After returning from Bosnia, where I traveled to study transitional justice and reconciliation in the aftermath of the most recent Bosnian war, I was motivated to examine Bosnian literature through the lens of philosophical interpretations of the human will-to-violence. This paper presents Bosnian author Miljenko Jergović’s collection of short stories, *Sarajevo Marlboro*, as a prism through which we might think about humanity’s violent impulses.

I use the theory, philosophy, and theology of thinkers like René Girard, Paul Ricoeur, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Richard Kearney as an ideological foundation for my approach to the multifaceted will-to-violence. I ultimately seek to better understand the internal logic and complexity of the violent impulse. If we understand our violent will, can we begin to adequately address it? Can we, armed with this knowledge, start to conceptualize reconciliation after war?

I argue that *Sarajevo Marlboro* holds up a mirror to its audience and asks them to consider the will-to-violence as a component of our personal and collective identities as human beings. Through the written repository of collective memory of violence that Jergović’s stories encapsulate, readers are invited to explore the ways in which they themselves might be implicated in wider society’s will-to-violence.

The paper explores the above claim through its close examination of three stories in Jergović’s collection: “Theft,” “Beard,” and “The Library.” It zeroes in on the violent acts depicted in these narratives and evaluates human responses to them. Before moving into a discussion of the various dimensions of the human will-to-violence evidenced in these three stories, the paper offers some context to Jergović’s and contemporary Bosnian prose. It discusses the functions of Bosnian literature that bears witness to violent conflict and offers insights into literature’s capacity as a genre to elicit emotional responses and destabilize its audience’s perspective.

Finally, the paper discusses the critical internal conditions that enable the active manifestation of the will-to-violence, namely a sense of emotional and spiritual detachment from the violent act and the willingness to dehumanize the victim.

The Closer to God, the Farther From the USSR: Religious Choices and Immigrant Identities

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This project attempts to discern how religious choices impact immigrant identity through qualitative research conducted among Russian immigrants in New York City. It focuses on two specific groups, the main one involving Russian immigrants who converted into Messianic Christianity after migration, as well as a contrast group consisting of Russian immigrants who re-committed to the Russian Orthodox Church. Findings illuminate different identity construction patterns in each group. While Messianic converts discard their ethno-cultural identity in favor of a religious one based primarily on otherworldly concerns, those re-committed to the Russian Orthodox Church firmly hold on to their ethno-cultural identity via a religious institution that

fulfills a variety of secular needs. Converts into Messianic Christianity emphasized their need for salvation, their desire to escape from the perceived intrinsic godlessness permeating their former lives, and the overwhelming necessity to construct an entirely new identity predicated on forgetting their origins, and embracing their new-found home, built upon their unshakable belief in god. Messianics yearn to shed their Russianness and fully envelop themselves in their newfound faith. In contrast, those re-committed to the Russian Orthodox Church build their identity upon memory and homesickness, remaining Russians above all else, and using the church as a social and emotional tool to reify their sense of belonging. Aided by the quintessential Russian church, they embrace their Russianness through longing and a creed that has more to do with nostalgia than with faith.

In addition to exploring an especially interesting and under-researched population, this project has the unique advantage of investigating religious choices among immigrants originating from a former socialist country, with 70+ years of institutionalized atheism. The generalizable results allow for further insight into the religious choices of immigrants fleeing totalitarian regimes, as well as the re-interpretive power of memory, faith, and nostalgia.

Islam, Politics, and Public Discourse: The Palestinian National Experience

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Researchers like Jose Casanova, Talal Asad, Charles Taylor and Craig Calhoun pointed out that the dominant social sciences categories are based on the premises dominated by the secular perspective. Concepts such as nationality, nationalism, state, citizenship and society are considered secular by nature, thus representing a view that religion should be relegated to the private sphere and should have no cultural, social or political consequences outside of it. It is only under certain conditions that religion can be included in other social phenomena. Talal Asad claims that public space is not neutral and not everyone has the right to speak and be heard. According to Assad, the public sphere is not a forum for rational debate, but it is a space of exclusion that is controlled by various forms of power.

Relations between religion and nationalism are diverse and it is difficult to make an unambiguous classification of nationalisms based on their attitude towards religious tradition. To this day, researchers discuss whether nationalisms that use religion are a manifestation of the process of sacralization of nationalisms, or whether they use its symbolism instrumentally. I will question whether such categorization is useful for the research on nationalism, if one accepts that nationalisms are not exclusively a secular phenomenon, and religion has no universal meaning in all national collectivities.

The aim of the paper goes beyond the unnecessary division into secular nationalism and the so-called religious nationalism. I will focus in particular on the issue of Islamic discursive tradition (developed by Talal Asad) and the use of this perspective for the study of Palestinian nationalism and their experience in organizing the relationship between religion in public space. I will use that perspective and combine it with the latest methods of analysing the so-called "Political Islam."

Islamism in Francophone Literature

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Submission of Michel Houellebecq, 2084, *The end of the world* and Boualem Sansal are two important and provocative francophone novels published in 2015 with a common haunting topic: the rise of Islamism. It is interesting to point out that the treatment of this issue is no longer the exclusive domain of sociologists, islamologists, and political scientists. It occupies today a much wider spectrum where literature occupies a place of choice. It seems at first sight that the two authors, French and Algerian, condemn in unison the establishment of a religious-based political system. In other words, they question his claim to sacredness as contrary to free will and the march of progress. Although the condemnation of the religious dictatorship is not a new fact in itself, since literature has always desecrated all forms of autocracy, I believe that there exists, even within their most ferocious condemnation, a call to the sacred or at least a form of spirituality. Under a blatant atheism, a suggestive way to say that the remedy to the West's existential malaise may lie in an ontological reconfiguration? How to articulate then, this new sensitivity that, in Michel Houellebecq's case for example, espouse the features of an ambient decadentism tinted with racism? Boualem Sansal, on the other hand, takes up the religious model of the book and the sacred language of the Koran to demystify a world sclerotic by its religion, but where a venerable human renaissance cannot be ruled out. So, from a comparative approach of these two novels, I will try to account for the complexity of contemporary religious sensibility in francophone literature and its relationship with a political and social reality marked by the seal of horror.

Ambedkrite Buddhism

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As a representative of depressed class, Ambedkar was called in the Round table conference in September, 1930. During the concocting of blue prints of constitution, Ambedkar clearly mentioned his demand of 'Separate Electoral' for depressed class because till that time he had realized that Hindus would never give equal rights to Dalits. The conversation, in Yervada Jail in 1932 with Gandhi and his disillusionment with Hindus, determined him on the issue of conversion. 'Annihilation of caste' reflects his dilemma about the existence of religion, in which at the end of his address, he reiterated his resolve to give up Hinduism.

"Though, I was born a Hindu, I solemnly assure you that I will not die as a Hindu" The paper highlights the reason for adopting 'Buddhism' with the reference of his Madras speech "Rationalism in India-Revolution and Counter Revolution". What inspired him, other than the religious assimilations, was that Buddhism focuses on "Purity of body and mind". The paper also elaborates the discontentment of Ambedkar with the two wheels- 'Hinayana' and 'Mahayana' of classical Buddhism and the zest to form his own materialist wheel, 'Navayana' which he radicalized in 'Buddha and Dhamma' and preached the road of knowledge and equality for everyone. I've also tried to elucidate the modalities, and the leadership quality of Dr. Ambedkar with which he was successfully able to unite nearly half a million men, women and children and

declared a cultural war on October, 14, 1956 at Nagpur, for reclaiming their dignity and liberty. The mass conversion was the result of years of agony, desperate quest of a casteless society for a dignified life.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight rationalist interpretation of Buddhism, disillusionment for Hinduism, the reason of conversion, his fascination about Buddhism, the journey of Ambedkar from a follower to digger of Buddhism, and how his Buddhism (Navayana) is a materialist form of classical buddhism.

Toleration or Liberty: The Impact of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Politics on Understanding Religious Liberty in America

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The first Baptists in England were oppressed as illegal dissenters. They were granted a measure of freedom in 1689 with the Act of Toleration. However, they were treated as second class citizens with limited rights. Full religious liberty eventually became the law of the land some 150 years later.

In America, Roger Williams founded Rhode Island in 1636 with religious liberty for all residents, but it was not until 1791, with the ratification of the First Amendment, that religious liberty was guaranteed to the entire nation. The politics of sexual orientation and gender identity have made significant inroads in modern society. Twenty years ago, no country in the world recognized same-sex marriage. Now, twenty-six, mostly western countries, recognize it. This drive for recognition and normalization is challenging the boundaries of religious liberty. In certain business areas, Christians are being given the choice of violating their consciences or suffer fines and possible imprisonment for not accepting commissions which celebrate this redefinition of marriage.

In the past, religious liberty in America was understood by consensus and defined in Supreme Court findings as encompassing one's beliefs and the ability to live out those beliefs. Advocates of including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes limit religious liberty to belief only. They view calls to protect the historic view of religious liberty as an excuse to perpetuate bigotry and discrimination. Religious liberty in America is being redefined in the terms that were previously used for toleration in Great Britain. This paper will compare this American redefinition with Great Britain's earlier definition of religious toleration. Similarities and differences will be highlighted and evaluated in light of historic understandings of religious liberty. Court findings and documents, enacted legislation, and journal articles will form the foundation of this research.

The Contested Concept of Secularism

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Everyone agrees that secularism is important but there is a great deal of disagreement about how this abstract idea works itself out in practice. Scholars did not discuss the concept in exactly

the same way. They understand secularism in slightly different ways. This understanding of secularism is important. Some French local authorities have banned the swimming costume worn by some Muslim women at public beaches. While a ban at public swimming pools could arguably be justified on public health grounds, it is hard to see how such a justification applies in relation to bathing in the sea. It seems that the real reason for banning the burqini is to enforce a particular view of secularism – i.e. people should not adopt forms of dress or conduct which express their religious beliefs in public places. This article aims to show that the concept of secularism is contested.

“Helping the Poorest of the Poor” Globalization of Suffering, White Savior Complex, Mother Teresa, Religion and Modernity

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In this ethnographic study, conducted at Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata (erstwhile Calcutta), India; I discuss how ideas about ‘globalization of suffering,’ ‘white savior complex,’ and ‘religion and modernity’ flow through volunteer tourism and development discourses. Utilizing postcolonialism and whiteness studies theoretical framework, I argue that much like imperialism is operationalized through different kinds of institutional power (agencies such as the IMF, WTO, World Bank), volunteer tourism exploits the Orient as the West’s pleasure periphery. I argue that Christian ideologies which were so dominant during the colonial days continue to pervade the structures and institutions in society with similar hegemonic connotations of privilege based on religion and race. I conclude asking few pertinent questions for future scholars to ponder **which** will enable a critical dialogue that adds significantly to our social science knowledge. Why should we allow institutions (such as ‘whiteness,’ Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity or numerous others in the Global North) to take care of the poor? Why serving the poor should be a religious Christian mission and not a secular one (considering the Global North’s preaching to the Global South)? When will our enthrallment with legends like Mother Teresa and Christian white men and women “helping” and “saving” people in the Global South that glorifies white Christian supremacy come to an end, if at all?

Religious Landscape in Liberec: The Postsocialist City in the Sudetenland

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The paper is focused on religious-geographical research of the city of Liberec, the fifth most populous city in the Czech Republic, a country known as one of the most secularized in the world. Liberec (predominantly German Reichenberg before 1945) is located in the border historical region called Sudetenland. The main aim of the paper is the analysis of the trends in the religious landscape of Liberec especially after the fall of communism in the country, however the expulsion of the German population after the Second World War cannot be overlooked. Crucial actual trends are secularization and diversification of religious institutions and communities. The paper outlines their main reasons and consequences. The methodology is based on the analysis of

the data from censuses run by the Czech Statistical Office and the field research in the city of Liberec. The field research was focused on identification and localization of sacred objects and religious activities. It was based on observation, information from interviews, websites or advertisements. It was found that Liberec is even more secularized than most cities of the Czech Republic and the probable cause is the expulsion of the Germans and their replacement by the people without traditions and relationship to the local countryside. Secularization has its effects on demographic stats as well as on the state of religious sites. It is necessary to point to a high relative number of believers of the Unity of the Brethren, which is one of highest in Czech cities, or quite high share of believers of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church. Another interesting aspect is the high share of believers of Eastern Christianity, which is connected with migration from Post-Soviet space.

Religion, Politics and Public Discourse: Framing Isil's Soldiers' Belief That They Carry out Allah's Will in the World by Executing Muslims, Christians and Jewish Hostage

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Based on a visual, verbal, and aural quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the 62 execution videos produced by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) during its first year of existence (2014-2015), the aim of this research is to further the understanding of the inherent religious and political nature of the narratives spread by ISIL execution videos and to which audience(s) they are targeted. We adopt a bottom up systematic approach of coding based on grounded theory in order to process visual and aural communication data as well as verbal communication of the seven hours long videos transcripts retrieved via InterCenter database. So doing, this research contributes to the comprehension of multi-modal communication interactions and the role of their discrepancies in framing fundamentalist religious ideologies. Moreover, the study adds perspective to previous research on jihadist visual communication and audience studies. Our results demonstrate how hostage execution videos discourse is relying on 'framing packages' linked to values, norms, and archetypes in order to create a recurrent and coherent organizational narrative aiming at segmenting religiously ISIL's target audiences.

Religion as Emotional Management: The Case of Sorrow and Death

Stephen Asma, Professor, Columbia College, US

Losing a family member or a lover is one of the greatest injuries that life can throw at us. Of course, existential dread of one's own death is a well-known impetus for religious belief. Fear is a language in which religion is fluent, but religion is also remarkably helpful in consoling sorrow.

Wanting one's deceased loved-one to be alive in an afterlife where we can see her again is not about one's gullibility per se. Our rational mind, after all, may feel quite awkward about such a belief. The burn of that hopeful and irrational desire, even amidst the contempt of one's own reason, is evidence that our bond was essential and fundamental –part of what Bernard Williams called our “ground projects.”

Critics of religion are quick to interpret the denial of death as “fear” and then treat it as cowardice. Christopher Hitchens (2007) for example says that religion will not die out until we “get over our fear of death” (pg. 12), and Sam Harris (2004) says, “without death, the influence of faith-based religion would be unthinkable.” (pg. 39). However, the triumph of magical thinking during the grieving period need not be a source of shame, nor a sign of weakness.

Sorrow is not the same as fear, nor is it motivated by fear. In this paper, I will first sketch the emotion of sorrow from the perspective of psychology, affective neuroscience, and sociology. Then I will show how religious belief and practice act as a positive form of emotional management for the bereaved. The management is not achieved primarily by theological narratives, but rather by positive affect, prosocial and adjunctive behaviors.

Finally, I will consider the implications of this case for religion as a pragmatic epistemology and culturally structured emotional therapy system.

Strategy of Ontological Negativity in Meister Eckhart’s Metaphysics and in Philosophical Traditions of India

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In this paper the author investigates the ontological strategies in Meister Eckhart's metaphysics which remounted to neoplatonism and the Corpus Areopagiticum and in two schools (darśanas) of Indian philosophical tradition: advaita-vedanta and early Buddhism. Along with differences in anthropology, gnoseology and soteriology of these traditions we can find the similar strategies of ontological negativity and mystical experience: detachment from the world of images and forms as the highest blessing; surrender to associate yourself with corporality, feelings, cognitive power and reason; interiorization of intentionality of consciousness and termination of its representative function; elimination of subject and object dichotomy. Practically all systems of Indian philosophy were projects of release, transformation of the person from being not free and suffering into being free and blissful. The idea of release of spirit is the cornerstone also of Christian doctrine about rescue as leaving of sins and sufferings and as a blissful unity with God. The apofatic doctrine of Christian mystics neoplatonics (which was certainly not dominate in Christianity) about concealment, non-comprehensiveness and inexpressibleness of God as the One and Nothingness and also the idea of comprehension of God by means of detachment from the created world and your own ego gives us the opportunity for such comparative analysis.

Muscular Secularism and the Governance of Hindu Identity in Singapore

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The Singapore state perceives the management of religion as being sacrosanct to the survival of a small and inherently vulnerable state. The critical need to manage religion carefully has seen the development of a secular policy that is distinctly expansive and intrusive.

This paper investigates the nature of secularism employed by the state towards managing Hinduism in Singapore. It does so firstly by studying the most prominent Hindu organisations, the Hindu Endowment Board and the Hindu Advisory Board. Secondly, it also examines the management of the popular Hindu festival, Thaipusam in Singapore.

The study contends that the Singapore state employs a strategy of muscular secularism in the management of religion. Muscular secularism refers to the expansive range of strategies that are available to a strong state to manage religion. Building on earlier literature, it is argued that a strategy of muscular secularism involves the state employing a wide variety of strategies to manage religion, ranging from the use of coercive laws to the co-option of religion bodies and even the gestural politics of liberalising spaces for religious practices.

This study contributes to the literature on management of religion in authoritarian regimes by calling for a nuanced view of state strength: strong states can, and often do, govern religion through a variety of strategies beyond draconian measures. The study further offers a new framework to understand how strategies are calibrated to deal with new challenges and plugs the current gap in literature that views muscular secularism as merely the function of coercive approaches towards the governance of religion.

Sacred Landscape: Memory and Re-Appropriating Historicity Through Political Discourses

Parul Lau Gaur, Assistant Professor, Ram Lal Anand College, India

Recent Scholarship has noted the importance of understanding the relations between identity, memory and landscape of people in the past. This paper attempts to apply this approach to a pan-Hindu sacred centre in India which although located in the periphery, not in a detrimental sense but in terms of geography, may remain quiescent in one historical epoch but was demarcated by certain rejuvenating aspects which help regain its religious significance under altered historical and political contingencies. The antiquity of the sacred center with its sacred landscape formed the basis of its memory which perpetuated in various historical epochs. It is imperative to take into cognizance the dynamic role of historical memory in re-appropriating the past of a sacred centre and its implications in the formulation and articulation of state ideologies, religious practices like rituals, festivals, endowments to temple deity which can be vividly gleaned through the lens of historical sources.

In order to closely observe landscape and gather historical data field visits were made to the concerned sacred center. Inscriptional evidence were also tapped which reinforces the connection between temple building and patrons Therefore focus would also be on deity / temple-patron relationship so as to highlight the changing fortunes of the sacred center. Even while maintaining its peripheral location, the sacred centre under scrutiny established connections, allegiances with mainland dynastic centers and neighbouring external states. Religion also plays an important role in shaping social and cultural identity of patrons An analysis is also made of the methods deployed by the main protagonist of sacred center who were successful in constructing narratives about themselves within their particular episteme through retrieving their historical past / memory so as to negotiate power with respect to large and more powerful overlords.

Mormon Soul Searching: The Distinctive Religiosity of Latter-day Saint Youth

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The book, *Soul Searching*, along with subsequent volumes and additional research, has underscored distinctively robust levels of religiosity exhibited by Latter-day Saint youth and young adults. This study offers a cultural explanation for these distinctive patterns by analyzing elite Mormon discourse in relation to key findings from the National Study of Youth and Religion. Elite LDS discourse and youth-oriented instruction is characterized by a remarkable degree of consistent messaging. Two themes that are quite prevalent in youth-directed LDS leaders' discourse are sacrifice (self-denial) and stigma (social deprecation). This discourse valorizes young people's self-sacrifice, thereby encouraging such practices such as tithing, fasting, sexual abstinence, and community service. Elite youth-directed discourse also aims to inoculate young Mormons against the otherwise negative repercussions of social deprecation through the deployment of theologically grounded stigma management strategies (e.g., mortality as a probationary period in an eternal progression, condemnation of "worldliness"). The study concludes by specifying the implications of these findings for ongoing scholarship and religious practice.

Faith by Seduction: The Children of God in Singapore

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This presentation sets out to explore the reasons behind the banning of The Children of God religious group in Singapore during the 1980s. This historical exploration will seek to examine the origin, popularisation, and diffusion of the Children of God in the United States of America (USA) during the 1960s and 1970s and its subsequent arrival into Singapore. Originating in the USA in late 1960s and arising from the broader religious landscape known as the Jesus People Movement or "Jesus Freaks", the Children of God called young people to a life of radical separation from family, school, work and normal social relationships. Their rejection of American values and confrontational style resulted in considerable hostility from family members, government, and the media. As such, the larger Jesus People Movement and the era of hippie culture and "Jesus Freaks" would also be explored in greater detail in this presentation. Correspondingly, this presentation will also discuss the ways in which Singapore manages Religion and religious issues, paying particular attention to the State's interaction with the Church. Such a discussion would be to facilitate the investigation of the possible reasons behind the banning of the Children of God in Singapore.

The introduction will cover a brief history and trace the trajectory of the Jesus People Movement during the 1960s in USA. In particular, features and characteristics of the Children of God organization and their subsequent interactions with the American society will be explored in greater detail. The introduction will also showcase how the Children of God was gradually perceived as a deviant cult and how the American society was viewed to be fundamentally antagonistic against the existence of the Children of God. Such an exploration would also include a brief discussion of cults in USA during the 1960s.

Next, an in-depth exploration of the interaction between Church and State in Singapore would be covered in the study. This would entail an investigation of the history and management of religious issues in Singapore. Particular attention would be devoted to the process of legitimizing a religious group in Singapore and an analysis of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. What generic ideology must a religious group possess, for example, before it gains credibility and recognition from the State? Similarly, what features must a religious group have for it to be banned by the Singapore government? A discussion of the Jehovah's Witnesses would briefly take place here.

Next, the ideologies and practices of the Children of God can then be juxtaposed with and compared against the State's officially approved religions and religious institutions. What features inherent in the Children of God's ideology, for example, made the Singapore government wary and unable to allow the group to take root in Singapore? And even with the banning of the Children of God, were there still traces of an underground movement happening in Singapore during the 1980s? Did the Children of God still manage to infiltrate the shores of Singapore and briefly operate illegally under the nose of the Singapore government?

Lastly, this study would use the Children of God as a case example to show the (possible) gaps and cracks within the regulation of religion and religious groups by the State in Singapore.

Spiritual Meanings' Influence on Future Job Satisfaction

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In a prospective analysis of the two-wave (2006–2007 and 2010–2011) Biopsychosocial Religion and Health Study, 6,056 individuals were assessed in order to examine potential factors affecting their later job satisfaction—including age, job stress and control, social support, and self-reported spiritual meaning in life—while controlling for potential confounders (e.g., financial difficulty, general health status). Study participants included Black and White, male and female, Seventh-day Adventists over age thirty-five ($M = 61.89$, $SD = 12.44$).

Greater spiritual meaning in life and job control predicted higher job satisfaction three years later ($\beta = 0.16$, $B = 0.153$, C.I. [0.127 – 0.180], $p = .000$; $\beta = 0.20$, $B = 0.154$, C.I. [0.133 – 0.176], $p = .000$ respectively). Interestingly, job stress was positively associated with higher job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.12$, $B = 0.10$, C.I. [0.07 – 0.12], $p = .000$). Participants however, generally reported moderate levels of job stress ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.97$), which may not have been enough to activate feelings of over-burden. Examination of potential gender interactions indicated physical health was more important to job satisfaction in men than women.

Organizations interested in retaining employees—especially aging employees, should consider strategies to enhance employees' sense of spiritual meaning and control in the workplace. Implications within the context of organizational management are discussed.

Teaching Religious Language and Culture to High School ESL Students

Mikayla Sievers, Graduate Student, University of Idaho, US

When students come from different linguistic/cultural backgrounds to an ESL class, they are introduced to the culture of their new language as well as other cultures. Culture becomes an integrated part of teaching language, and religion heavily influences culture and in return, language.

I developed a project focused on teaching religious language to ESL students as a unit in a US-based high school classroom. The project introduces students to religion in their new culture and other cultures they may encounter. Students learning religious vocabulary and content in English will gain language skills to explain their own religion in English, particularly if it is not the dominant one in the host community. In addition, they may possibly confront stereotypes about certain religious groups. The project uses Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence and Intercultural Speakers model and the Communicative Competence model (Hymes, 1972) to learn the language and culture. The students will engage in their own third space, a place of understanding which melds information from both the student's original experience and his or her host community (Krasmsch, 1993). The purpose of this project is to teach language through content. The students will learn religious vocabulary and English pronunciation of these words as well as grammar structures and how to speak about religion in different contexts. The content being learned consists of religious beliefs, values, and problems religious people face in society.

Some of the student learning outcomes of this project include defining religious words, naming characteristics of the major world religions, and developing speaking fluency from class discussions. In this presentation, I will discuss the theoretical frameworks of the project, the student learning outcomes and timeline of the unit, and sample lesson plans for ESL teachers to use.

Configuring “Traditional” Authority: Religious Knowledge and the Place of Ulama in Sunni Muslim Self- Fashioning, Kerala, South India

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The paper explores how the Sunni Muslims in contemporary Kerala, a state in southwest India, reconfigure the notions of ‘traditional’ religious authority by articulating distinct conceptions of religious knowledge and the place of ulama in Islam. Some of the fundamental transformations characteristic to the age viz. emergence of bureaucratic forms of social organization, political formations like modern nation-state, secularism as a political doctrine and proliferation of religious knowledge through print technologies carried huge implications for the discourses and practices surrounding religious authority and vice versa. Bringing into fore the question of reasoned and multiple interpretations of faith as well as the right to interpret, such engagements critically informed the changing conceptions of religious authority and the role of religious authorities; men who asserted their authority as “custodians of change” within the community. Entailing newer kinds of subject formation and self-fashioning, these dynamics pertaining to legitimation of religious power became central in the modern articulations of religious identity. Contestation over religious authority among Muslims in Kerala too is

inextricably intertwined with the emergence of modern Muslim subject and identity formations as well as invariably regarding the place accorded to religious authorities or the ulama. Contingent upon the specific social and historical context, as it were, debates over the place of ulama continue to be constitutive of Muslim identity articulations within the community; albeit in new ways. Using ethnographic data and historical observations, the paper engages with such shifting dynamics in the case of a particular Sunni Muslim identity formation among Kerala Muslims. Critically exploring the discourses and practices concerning the place of ulama, the paper argues that such new kinds of engagement with ‘tradition’ play a crucial role in the self-fashioning of Sunni Muslims in contemporary Kerala and point towards the complex relationship between knowledge and authority in South Asian Islam.

Why Did Medieval Commentators and Scholars Assume that the Sages Knew the peshat (sensus literalis)?

Eran Viezel, Professor, Ben Gurion University, Israel

In the course of the ninth century, Jewish intellectuals in the Babylonian cultural sphere began to interpret the Bible literally on the basis of language, syntax and context. This hermeneutic method, called peshat exegesis spread from the East to the West and reached its apex in the twelfth century in northern France.

Medieval peshat commentary constitutes a new stage in the history of Jewish biblical exegesis. Despite many points of continuity, it is customary in academic research to distinguish this approach from those of previous periods. The essential difference between these eras lies in the use of the peshat method, specifically the commentator’s awareness of its methodological principles and commitment to them. It is therefore surprising that medieval scholars, including the peshat commentators themselves, casually assumed that peshat exegesis had been known from time immemorial and that even the rabbinic sages had been aware of its principles. From their perspective, the difference between them and the sages was merely formal: the sages, for a variety of reasons, paid scant attention to peshat exegesis, while they themselves devoted considerable attention to it. However, in their eyes, the peshat methodology and its principles were not in themselves innovative. How can we explain this assumption?

As I shall demonstrate, this assumption is based a combination of philological and linguistic considerations with polemical and apologetic factors. To that, we must assume the existence of a cognitive mechanism, semi-conscious or unconscious, that enables believers to unconditionally accept significant change, out of deep inner conviction that it is not a real change and that in essence the principles of their faith, the fundamental practices to which they cleave and their ways of reading and understanding their sacred texts have never changed.

The Impact of God on Ethical Concerns in the Early Church

Nancy Enright, Professor, Seton Hall University, US

The early Christians lived in a world as eclectic and complex as ours. This paper will explore ethical issues addressed in early Christian writings, including excerpts from epistles of Paul, Peter, James, and John, as well as writings by selected other writers, including Perpetua, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Ignatius of Antioch. Issues addressed will be the treatment of the poor, the role of women, infanticide, and military service. Concern for the poor is clear in many of the epistles in the New Testament. The book of Acts describes how the first Christians held all things in common. Though the developing Christian communities may not have lived in complete community with completely shared goods, the generosity and taking care of the poor among the early Christians was widely known. The role of women also was an ethical issue, developing over time to allow for a leader like Perpetua of Carthage to write as she does in her prison journal. Key concerns in that journal would be her role in the church, the connections with her family, and her impact on other believers. The issue of infanticide will be discussed, as it was a pervasive custom, and Christianity addressed it powerfully. Finally, the question of whether or not Christians could or should serve in the military was addressed as well. In the complex world of the early church, Christians had to address concerns that are similar to those faced today. How did a belief in God impact these concerns? How did an active sense of the presence of God impact the lives of believers?

Gregory the Great on the Conversion of Jews

Bernard Schlager, Associate Professor, Pacific School of Religion, US

In this paper I examine the 26 surviving letters written by Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540 – 604) that deal with issues relating to Jewish individuals and communities, in general, and to Jewish converts to Christianity, in particular.

I argue that this pope's policies towards the Jews, which were informed by Roman legal precedence and long-standing church law, guaranteed the Jewish people a right to exist unmolested within Christendom. When a synagogue was taken over by Christians in Cagliari, for instance, Gregory demanded that the building be returned to the Jewish community as required by law.

While Gregory the Great strongly discouraged the forced baptisms of Jews and showed no interest in a widespread mission to convert the Jews, he did support their conversion as long as it accomplished through peaceful means that sought to convince the Jews of the truth of the Christian faith. When the pope learned of the forced conversions of Jews in Gaul, he condemned the practice in a letter to two bishops and strongly urged that conversions be sought through effective preaching rather than by means of force because of the high likelihood that a convert forced to the baptismal font was highly likely to his return to his "former superstition."

Given Gregory's stature throughout the medieval period, his thoughts on the conversion of Jews (as contained in his letters) proved to be an important and precedent-setting source for later church leaders who were faced with attempts to forcibly convert Jews to the Christian faith. Although we find a typically anti-Jewish bias in some of his theological writings, it is in Gregory's letters that we discover his views on the only acceptable means of bringing Jews into the church: by conviction and not through coercion.

Religion and Construction of Social Reality

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This study seeks to define nomos and the Cosmic frame of reference that are the main mechanisms of the role of religion in the world-building activities (Berger 1967). Then, they will be applied in the Baha'i Faith world-building enterprise, to improve Berger's conception from theory into practice.

In the history of civilization, religion has been thought of as a key factor in construction and deconstruction of the society. Peter Berger (1967) has developed a relevant theory to interpret the role of religion in the world-building activity. The concepts of "Cosmic frame of reference" and "nomos" are central to Berger's theory (1967) because Cosmic frame of references as Berger illuminates, religion plays the crucial role in the social construction of reality by introducing a sacred Cosmic frame of reference as well as a related nomos or a set of sacred order that directs the community towards it.

The first serious discussion and analysis of the role of religion in the endeavours of social constructing emerged during the first decades of the twentieth century by Durkheim (1912) and Weber (1920). However, for a long time before Peter Berger and Tomas Luckmann (1966), there is not a significant study in this matter. Since 1967 that Berger published his crucial theory of social reality of religion about the role of religion in the world-building activities, there are not sufficient studies in this area.

Accordingly, what we know about the role of religion in the world-building enterprise is largely based on Berger's theoretical study that interprets religion as a socially constructed reality (Berger 1967). This study, in particular, explores the crucial concepts of Berger's theory (1967) to equip itself enough to elucidate the Baha'i procedure of erecting their desired society. There are two very vital concepts defined by Berger (1967) to be applied to the interpretation of the world building endeavours of a given community that is cosmos and nomos. This article analyses the related Baha'i scriptures using the benefit of these two concepts and their derivatives such as cosmization, cosmology, and nomization.

Correspondingly, this study attempts to introduce the Unity of Humankind as the Cosmic frame of reference and the Baha'i Administrative Order as the nomos in Baha'i community building efforts. A brief exploration of Berger's theory about the relationship between religion and world-building will clarify the meanings and the status of the central concepts of his theory, namely Cosmic frame of reference and nomos. Then by exploring relevant Baha'i sacred writings a case for the Unity of Huma.

Scarlet and Christ: A Tale of Two Dragons and One Human Family

Timothy Cooke, Student, University of Nevada, US

For millennia, scholars and clergy have pondered the serpent seed doctrine. Some Jews have used this doctrine to discriminate against Gentiles. Some Gentiles, especially Adolf Hitler,

have used the same doctrine to exterminate Jews. “Scarlet and Christ: A Tale of Two Dragons and One Human Family” goes back to Genesis and reexamines this doctrine. This paper revolutionizes the serpent seed doctrine and opens up a new methodology to understanding the entirety of scripture. By identifying and categorizing names, traits, and symbols in Genesis, I have successfully operationalized the "serpent seed" in Genesis and have created two lines: Scarlet line and Serpent line. By looking at attributes of biblical figures this methodology can accurately pinpoint who is scarlet line and serpent line. Then, after a genealogy check, one can confirm their lineage!

After making this model, another discovery was made. The clashes that originated in Genesis did not end in Genesis! Thru this new methodology, I have found a hidden link between Genesis, scripture, and history. Saul vs David, Jeroboam vs Rehoboam, even the enmity between Peter and Paul can be reduced to an echo of Genesis. If one applies my model, one sees a perpetual clash between the descendents of Leah and Rachel. If one digs deeper, one can see the eternal clash between scarlet line and serpent line.

The overarching argument of this piece isn't conflict, however, but peace; not enmity, but brotherhood. This discovery will not divide humanity but unite it. Genesis 49 gives a messianic prophecy of a figure called Shiloh. He will have eyes “red like wine and teeth white like milk” (Genesis 49:12). By applying “Scarlet and Christ” to Genesis 49 one can see that Shiloh will neither be scarlet line nor serpent line, but a combination of them both!

Female Figures Understood Through Judges 4-5

Sydney Beckmann, Student, University of Notre Dame, US

This paper examines Judges 4-5 and the relationship between Deborah, Jael, and the mother of Sisera as a lens through which to better understand the constructed relationship between Eve, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary. In viewing these characters typologically, one sees a pattern develop in which the women are presented on a spectrum of passivity, activity, and sexuality. Each story depicts three women in which one character is totally passive, the other totally active and sexual, and the third is the intermediary character. While the narrative of Judges 4-5 exists as a single biblical account, the narrative of Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene was constructed by many people over hundreds of years. This paper argues that, in constructing the Eve, Mary Magdalene, and The Virgin Mary figures, the early Church, specifically the Early Church Fathers, constructed a similar spectrum of women found in Judges 4-5. However, unlike in Judges where the value is assigned to the active/sexual heroine, the construction was inverted so that the value was assigned to passivity and the suppression of female sexuality. This paper does not argue that the Early Church Fathers specifically referenced Judges 4-5 when constructing their narrative. Rather, it is likely that this portrayal of women was common, and they drew from these popular depictions, though inverting them to suit their specific agenda. The interpretation of Eve, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary has been and continues to be influential to the role of women in Western society. Therefore, using Judges 4-5 and understanding more completely the history and deliberate construction of these depictions has implications not only in scholarship for

the interpretation of other female biblical characters, but also more practically for society and the place of women within it.

Gender Construction and Performativity in Religious Folklore-Insights from Hindu Vrat Kathas

Neha Zaidka, Student, University of Oulu, Finland

Gender has proven to be an important category of analysis in religious studies. Religions have been criticised by feminists over the decades for the oppression of women. Hinduism, world's third largest religion, has a legacy of story tradition that dates back to the Upanishads written during 800-200 BCE. Among other things, these stories construct a normative idea of what it is to be a woman and a man. A lot of gender-analysis textual research has been conducted on the classic, well-known Hindu texts. However, the textual research on vrat kathas, category of commonly read texts during vrat ritual, is scarce. While few vrat kathas have already been mentioned in the ancient texts such as the Upanishads, they have become highly popular in the contemporary times. These vrat kathas are in Sanskritized Hindi, that people can read and understand (given the increasing literacy), unlike the other Sanskrit epics, that usually have a limited readership of priests and scholars. The idea of vrat ritual, which is conveyed through kathas, is to eat and act in a specific way to gain the fruits of the vrat, these guidelines work as code of laws for people to act in a religiously appropriate way. Using thematic content analysis, on ten weekly vrat kathas, and a lens of karma and dharma along with Butler's theory of performativity, this study explores normative gender construction in vrat kathas. This study shows that binary categories of women and men are constructed in contrast to each other, where on one hand women are normatively constructed as compassionate, obedient to husband, dutiful for the domestic chores, men, on the other hand, are constructed as individualistic, successful and detached from their families.

Race and the American Catholic Imagination

Cary Dabney, Adjunct Professor, Walsh University, US

At times in the American Catholic Church's history, she has written pastoral letters regarding race in America. In 1958, American Catholic bishops wrote Discrimination and Christian Conscience to condemn the blatant forms of racism found in segregation and the "Jim Crow" laws. Ten years later in the spring of 1968, the bishops again penned a letter entitled National Race Crisis to condemn the scandal of racism and the policies which led to the eruption of violence in many major cities across America. Then again, in 1979, the bishops wrote Brothers and Sisters to Us, a pastoral letter addressing how racism was still affecting so many, highlighting the structural and institutional forms of racial injustice evident in the economic imbalances found in our society. These three documents directly addressed issues concerning race within America's borders over a relatively short period of time. It demonstrates that during the turbulent sixties and seventies the American Catholic Church was aware of the persistent evil of racism. However, along with the words of condemnation against racism; there is explicit evidence that the practices

of the American Catholic Church silently allowed an increase of racial inequality not only among the general populace, but within its own structure, thereby giving unjust racial attitudes their tacit approval.

In anticipation of a pastoral letter being released by the American bishops later this year, this project will conduct a critical analysis of the social teaching on racism admonished by these three prior documents in an effort to identify their weaknesses, articulate in what way the American Catholic Church needs to define racism, and identify what essential elements must be present in the upcoming pastoral letter to ensure progress in the Catholic Church's attitude toward race in the American Catholic imagination.