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**Abstracts**

Symposium Facilitator: **Canon Brian Mountford**, MBE

**Smiling at Fear: Theorising Parrhesia and Sustained High-risk Nonviolent Action**

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*Paul Alexander, Visiting Scholar, University of Birmingham, UK*

In the last lectures before his death, Michel Foucault explored the ancient Greek practice of dangerous truth-telling – parrhesia (Foucault 2001, 2011, 2012). He recognized that there were and are truths that can be lived and spoken that endanger the relationships or lives of those who enunciate them. Those who live these dangerous truths are parrhesiastes. In this paper, I offer my reading of Foucault's genealogy of parrhesia and argue that these practices are evident in the lives of exemplars of sustained high-risk nonviolent action I studied in the West Bank. The project explored the characteristics and practices of people who stay engaged in high-risk peace and justice work for more than five years. We collected both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews, observations, film, photos) data for this study of risk-taking behaviour, during which we visited sites and interviewed exemplars and collaborators. Participants had to meet a fourfold criteria set to be included: 1) nominated exemplars, 2) Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians (as mystical religion; Chrulew 2014; Jennings 2014; Pinto 2016), 3) engaged in peace and justice work, and 4) working in a high-risk environment. We interviewed those whose work includes nonviolent action, peacemaking, peacebuilding, conflict transformation, violence reduction, accompaniment, and social justice. We defined a high risk as working in a context under military duress or where physical violence, life-threatening disease, or imprisonment is likely to occur. Our data collection included eight extended trips to Israel and the West Bank. While both employing and critiquing Foucault's terminology and analysis, I theorise that sustaining political parrhesia (dangerous veridiction toward institutions in public life) correlates positively with practicing philosophical, or ethical, parrhesia in personal relationships (dangerous veridiction in community life) and parrhesia with oneself – *techne tou biou*, the art of living or caring for the self (Macmillan 2011; Simpson 2012). Exemplars who practice political parrhesia for sustained periods work in or create communities where philosophical parrhesia is facilitated and practiced, and they practice techniques of examination (*askesis*) – that is, they accept the challenge to “confront the truth” about themselves.

## **The Kitab-i-Aqdas in Light of the Bible and the Qur'an: An Interreligious Hermeneutic Approach**

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*Robert Bianchi, Assistant Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar*

Called “the Mother Book of His Dispensation” (Effendi & Townshend, 1970), the Kitab-i-Aqdas (“The Most Holy Book”) of Baha’u’llah, founder of the Baha’i Faith, holds an unparalleled place among the voluminous writings of its author. As the primary book of laws among Baha’is, the Kitab-i-Aqdas (c. 1873), may be likened in importance to the Torah among Jews, the Old and New Testaments among Christians, and the Qur’an among Muslims. Contributing to the field of interreligious hermeneutics (Cornille & Conway, 2010), this paper is groundbreaking in bringing together texts from three different religious traditions using corpus-based discourse analytic approach to compare the thematic, stylistic and pragmatic features of the authorised English translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas to those of the King James Bible Version and Rodwell’s Qur’an, translations whose literary style have greatly influenced the translation of the former (Volker, 1990). To achieve this, WordSmith 6.0 was used to compile wordlists, keyword lists (Bondi & Scott, 2010) and concordances. Next, the original Arabic Kitab-i-Aqdas and Qur’an were compared, highlighting the addressees apostrophised by Baha’u’llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas against those mentioned in the Qur’an. The findings indicate that, while there is much overlap in themes among these three holy books, the Kitab-i-Aqdas distinguishes itself from its sister scriptures through 1) a markedly involved communication style with a high ratio of first and second person pronouns e.g. “I/me/my,” “we/us/our,” “thou/thee/thy,” and “ye/you/your” (see Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1998), 2) relatively complex lexis (see Baker, 2000), and 3) an intriguingly wide array of addressees including rulers e.g. “O King of Berlin” (Kaiser Wilhelm), “O Presidents of America,” and “O Kings of the Earth;” religious scholars e.g. “Concourse of Divines;” and most frequently, the entire human race e.g. “O peoples of the world.” These findings underscore the highly personalised yet universalist message of its author.

## **On the Services of Blessing and Sanctification of Icons: Spirituality and Politics**

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*Hellen Dayton, Independent Scholar, UAE*

The Orthodox Offices of Sanctification of icons did not traditionally exist in Orthodoxy. Four controversial Services of Blessing and Sanctification of Icons first appeared in the “Euchologion” (1646) of the Metropolitan of Polish-occupied Ukraine, Piotr Mogila. The theology of these services, slightly touched on by T. Spidlik (“Russkaya Idea,” 2006, p. 330), has external interdenominational and interreligious dimensions which Cardinal Spidlik SJ did not

examine and I employ a synthesized methodology of linguistic and iconographic analysis in depth to prove it. These services look like an attempt on the one hand to negotiate the relationships with Catholics and, on the other hand, to appeal to and convert the large Jewish population of Poland, while keeping the apparent traditional array of the Orthodox Church services. While Mogila derived the basics of the order of blessing and sanctification of “Imaginum” from “Rituale Romanum” of 1614 (p. 264), he is highly attentive to Jehovah. These offices include Psalms absent from “Rituale Romanum;” prayers of petition referring to God the Father. Mogila invents independently from Catholics the blessing rite of images representing the Holy Trinity, which also refers to God the Father with Psalm 66 (67) as the core part of the service. Moreover, the unheard prayers, which a priest must read secretly, ask God the Father to send the grace of the Holy Spirit upon the sanctified icon(s) to avoid possible clashes with Catholics on Filioque. However, the Metropolitan still uses it to maintain accord with Constantinople Patriarchate without contradicting Jews, on whom he looked as possible converts to Orthodox Christianity, and the same Euchologion has such a service for converting Jews. Although the prayers of the services clearly refer to John Damascene and hesychastic passages on the “eye of nous,” they were adopted not by the Patriarchate of Constantinople but by Moscow.

## **Describing Muslim Hindutva in Contemporary India**

*Ana de Souza, Graduate Student, Concordia University, Canada*

Hindu Nationalism or Hindutva is a social, political, and religious force that has recently been making headlines in India. Due to the politics involved and the immediacy of the events, simple descriptions are often the norm. This paper seeks to provide a more complex understanding of Hindu Nationalism as it exists today in the Republic of India by examining the role of Muslims within Hindutva. To develop this large goal in an expansive movement, cow protection (गौसेवा), the promotion of the welfare of cows and their progeny through legal, social, economic, political, and religious means, will be the specific area of interest. A common implication of cow protection on the subcontinent is that Muslim Indians are often the targets of cow protection-related violence. This makes the existence of Muslim advocates of cow protection an intriguing phenomenon. This paper will focus on advocacy organizations such as the Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM), a Muslim Hindutva voluntary organization. Analysis of their self-described reasoning for taking this position, relying primarily on self-published texts and journalism around the MRM and its activities, identifies many characteristics of mainstream Hindutva within their discourse. This locates the MRM as part of mainstream Hindutva in their thought, if not their numbers.

## **Al-Ghazali's Integral Epistemology: a Critical Analysis of the Jewels of the Quran**

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*Amani Mohamed Elshimi, Senior Instructor, The American University in Cairo, Egypt*

The Jewels of the Quran by renowned Islamic scholar Abu Hamid al-Ghazali has usually been published as a two-volume publication, consisting of al-Ghazali's hierarchy of sciences, followed by a thematic classification of verses from the Quran. A recent edition of the book includes a third chapter which is often published alone as The Book of Forty Religious Principles, but which al-Ghazali makes reference to in his introduction. A thorough, contextualized, critical analysis of the 3-chapter publication reveals al-Ghazali's more comprehensive integral framework of knowledge – one which stems from and is held by a core experience of the Divine, and where levels of knowledge, practice, intuition, endowed spiritual states and evolving stations form an integral cycle of learning. The new outline of Al-Ghazali's theory explains his earlier skepticism and emotional crisis, and justifies his post-crisis views on the methodologies of philosophy, science, mysticism and law.

## **The Symbolism of Secular Rituals**

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*Jan A. Kozák, Researcher, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic*

Secular rituals are usually not perceived as rituals by the majority of secular Westerners. Scholars usually are aware of their ritual nature, but rarely use the same language as they use when discussing prototypical religious rituals. In the process of our early age socialization and later education we are installed into our symbolic system, which is internalized and becomes transparent, invisible. The by-product of this process is that we learn to overlook the myths and rituals of contemporary secular culture, and we label them as something of different nature. Secular Westerners curiously observe colourful rituals of e.g. an African tribe, calling it “religion” (contrasting with their non-religiousness) as if something that “weird” and “superstitious” was completely alien to their rational secular life – all the while the Westerners themselves perform even more elaborate and grandiose (and weird) rituals. For instance, as part of the secular Christmas celebration most people put a sacrificed tree inside their house and adorn it (in a way reminding us of the adornment of sacrificial victim in Classical Antiquity or some parts of today's India). In the months before the ritual itself they participate in zealous acquisition of gifts (which massively influences Western culture and economy), performing another version of symbolic sacrifice (sacrificing their money). The rite itself is enacted with a day of feasting and copious gift-giving comparable to the Potlatch feasts. In contrast to typical Potlatch they don't practice the destruction of property, but the feature of abundant “giving away” is similar. In my paper I will present a specific reading of several secular or secularized rituals (Christmas, New Year, American Halloween, Czech Easter, St. Valentine) showing their

similarity to prototypical religious rituals and emphasizing the camouflaged presence of potent ritual elements (sacrifice, liminality, reenactment of mythic images etc.).

## **Secular Relevance of Religious Language: The Case of Christian Construction of Ecological Concepts of God**

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*Bryan Mok, Graduate Student, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR*

This paper offers a critical discussion of the presumed separation between religious and secular language by revealing the secular relevance of words of faith. While many accept Habermas' institutional translation proviso that requires all religious discourses to be translated into generally accessible language in order to be discussed in the procedure of policy-making, this paper attempts to argue that religious expressions often overlap with everyday speeches and that theology is a public enterprise which brings out the secular significance of religious language. The way Christian theologians such as Gordon Kaufman and Sallie McFague construct their concepts of God in response to the ecological crisis with religious words serve as an example to illustrate this position. On the one hand, Kaufman's conception of God as serendipitous creativity which continuously brings new and novel realities into being all along the evolutionary and historical trajectories of the world makes Christian language meaningful to the general discussion of ecological issues. On the other hand, McFague's metaphor of God as the spirit of the world and the world as the body of God underscores human responsibility for sustainability. Both demonstrate the secular relevance of Christian expressions without renouncing the use of religious terms and hence call Habermas' rigorous assumption that religious language is unintelligible to secular subjects into question. In this light, this paper claims that the validity of a discourse in the political sphere should depend not on its style or form of expression but on whether it is concerned with public interest.

## **God's Paintbrush: A Case Study of Congregational Response to Bible-Based Murals at Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas**

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*Debbie Potter, Professor, Trinity Baptist University of the Americas, US*

This research study was conducted to describe ways an innovative approach to children's ministry can reach children to deepen their spiritual development. This study was an exploratory, qualitative single case study that described adults' perception of 55,000 square feet of artwork done in the children's building at Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas. Data was collected from multiple sources: interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. The results of the

study showed some predictable outcomes, such as beauty, communicative power of art, and Biblical connections. The surprise finding was the most significant impact of the artwork was the act of servant leadership in the artist herself. It created a spiritual awakening in the members of Trinity Baptist Church that inspires others to use the gifts God has given them to serve.

### **Self-immolation Among the Suruwahá: A Case Study on Human Sacrifice in Brazil**

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*Braulia Ribeiro, Graduate Student, Yale University, US*

Using as a basis the case of the Suruwahá, a small and isolated indigenous group of the Brazilian Amazon basin, this paper discusses the anthropological approach used in the study of the practice of suicide, or the ritual of self-immolation practiced by the Suruwahá and other indigenous tribes. It will argue that the interpretation offered by Amerindian Perspectivism, also called Multi-naturalism, that is now prevalent among scholars of Amerindian cultures does not account for the religious nature of such ritual, nor is a fair portrait of the indigenous cosmology. This paper discusses the scholarly influences that make the exegesis of some anthropologists of the Brazilian Amerindian universe read as an Enlightenment treaty, privileging a rationality isolated from any relation with the metaphysical world hence ignoring spirituality, and reducing religious practice to the mere repetition or enforcement of social traditions. This paper proposes a different look applying a spiritual paradigm and the taxonomy of sacrifice proposed by Evans-Pritchard as an exegetical basis to understand the phenomena.

### **Consecrated for Your Service: Notions of Female Authority and Sacred Space**

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*Maryanne Saunders, Graduate Student, King's College London, UK*

Consecrated space, that which is formally designated holy, is an important part of religious life for Jews, Muslims and Christians. Places of worship are integral for community life, learning and leadership. Women in these spaces however are at best underrepresented and at worst completely erased. Mothers and their wombs are often considered sacred precedents of the devotional space, yet they have historically been excluded from being seen and exercising authority in their own communities. In the last couple of decades, a growing number of female artists such as Jacqueline Nichols, Boushra Almutawakel and Leni Dothan have been challenging the roles of women in sacred spaces. This paper will explore the contradiction that exists in many Abrahamic religious congregations in which women are both celebrated and excluded within physical space. By analysing the textual precedence for women's simultaneous

sanctity and silence I intend to highlight this ongoing debate and the responses by women artists across religious traditions, reclaiming their authority to lead, learn and inspire.

## **Rivers, Caves, and Trees: Corporeal Realizations of Maternal Ecologies in South Asia**

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*Anna Thurston, Graduate Student, Yale University, US*

This presentation centers around the synthesis of three different socio-religious practices within the geography of South Asia, specifically in the regions of India and the Tibet Autonomous Region in southwest China. Careful consideration of the Yamuna River in India, cave meditation practices in Eastern Tibet, and the 1970s Chipko movement reveals a salient motif persistent in these narratives, their people, and the immediate landscapes: that of the maternal body. Through analysis and braiding-together of specific particularities in these river, cave, and tree-centered rituals, this presentation conceptualizes these practices in conversation with maternal feminism and simultaneously advocates for the promise of what I articulate as a subset of ecotheology, or in other words, the richness and resonance of a “maternal ecology.” This cross-comparative study is designed to investigate the cognitive underpinnings of what I posit to be a “natural theology of mothering” in order to articulate religious, theological, and/or ecological relationships. While the association between the feminine and land—or even the divine feminine with geo-specific identity—is not new, this presentation will retrieve, reevaluate, and reconstruct the ontological implications of an ecomaternal approach and the problems and promises it presents to the relationship between humankind and the natural environment. This paper’s findings reveal social equivocation in the reality of an ecosystem regarded as simultaneously divine and unchanging yet also aging and in need of external assistance, expound upon the symbolic placental consciousness found in mountains, and frame the active use of the matriarchal social body in response to systematic afforestation. My conclusion petitions for a new approach to environmental reciprocity in order to adequately and actively care for caregiver, whether it be through the lens of an aging parent, a new mother in need of corporeal recuperation, or the sustained support and protection of the familial, which is inherently bound in the ethics of earth-bound care.