

Research in Religious Studies 2017

April 29 – 30, 2017

SATURDAY

- 8:00 – 9:00 **Light Breakfast and Registration** **Anderson Hall (hallway)**
- Session 1** **Ways of approaching Religiosity** **AH116**
Presiding: J. Linville
- 8:30 - 9:05 Opening remarks/announcement: J. Linville
- 9:05 - 9:35 Perceptions of Wellness in the Bhutanese Community of Lethbridge & Filmic Story Bridging: Exploring Religious and Cultural Community Through Mixed Methods
Erin Davis and Jeff Bingley, University of Lethbridge
- 9:35 - 10:05 Are Personality Traits and Degree of Religiosity in Judaism Associated?
Lauren Vomberg, University of Lethbridge
- 10:05 - 10:15 **10 Minute Break**
- Session 2A** **Indigenous World Views** **AH116**
President: Chris Daniels, University of Calgary
- 10:15 - 10:45 “Discovering Who”: Inuit Naming Practices and Beliefs
Jane Crichton, University of Calgary
- 10:45 - 11:15 All My Relations: Yup'ik Ontology and Ceremonial Traditions in the 1800s
Sean Corey Binder, University of Calgary
- 11:15 - 11:45 A Well-Balanced Relationship: The Sámi Key to Health
Kathryn Bauer, University of Calgary
- 11:45 - 12:00 Open discussion on Indigenous World Views.
- Session 2B** **Science Fiction** **AH117**
President: James Linville, University of Lethbridge
- 10:15 - 10:45 Under my Umbrella: Religious Allusions in the Resident Evil Movie Franchise
Kimberley Humphries, University of Lethbridge
- 10:45 - 11:15 Examination of Post Humanism from the Perspective of Rights, Responsibilities, and Expectations within the Context of Science Fiction Entertainment
Victoria Layton, University of Lethbridge
- 11:15 - 11:45 *Star Wars: Influencing and Taking Influence from Religion Since 1977*
Simoneau, Jenna, University of Lethbridge
- 11:45 - 12:00 Open discussion

Session 2C	Mind's Journeys	AH118
	Presiding: Atif Khalil, University of Lethbridge	
10:15 - 10:45	St. Jean, Dillon University of Lethbridge Voice of the Valley Stream: Nishitani Keiji; the Man and his Thought	
10:45 - 11:15	Peta, Conner University of Lethbridge A "Traditionalist" Critique of the Modern World: Nasr's <i>Knowledge and the Sacred</i>	
11:15 - 11:45	Findlay, Taylor University of Lethbridge Seek Nothing, Find Enlightenment: A Review of the Teachings of Ramesh Balsekar	
11:45 - 12:00	Open discussion	

LUNCH 12:00-1:00

Session 3A	Sufism	AH116
	Presiding: Atif Khalil, University of Lethbridge	
1:00 - 1:30	But Who Prays for Satan? Iblis' Origins in Sufi Islamic Thought <i>Kimberley Humphries, University of Lethbridge</i>	
1:30 - 2:00	The Self as One: Non-dual Notions of Selfhood in 'Aṭṭār's Conference of the Birds <i>Bruce A. Coates, University of Lethbridge</i>	
2:00 - 2:30	The Three Yaqeens: Ali Nur al-Din al-Yashruti's Approach to Knowledge, Vision and Truth of Certainty <i>Ali Adel Fares, University of Exeter</i>	

Session 3B	Religious Women: Agency, Activism, Influence	AH117
	Presiding: TBA	
1:00 - 1:30	Consider the Lilies... Women's agency and the act of dressing religiously <i>Hannah Forbes, University of Lethbridge</i>	
1:30 - 2:00	The Way Gave Birth to Unity: Exploring Classical Taoist Literature as a Resource for Modern Feminist Thought <i>Jessica Knoop, University of Lethbridge</i>	
2:00 - 2:30	N/A	

- Session 3C Early Church 1 AH118**
 Presiding: Anne Moore, University of Calgary
- 1:00 - 1:30 Monasticism as a Proponent of Early Christianity: Justifying its Qualitative Character through the Life and Works of Early Monastic Leaders
Wynona Nethercott, University of Lethbridge
- 1:30 - 2:00 Mammon or God?: The Class Structure of Early Christianity
Madison Stocker, University of Lethbridge
- 2:00 - 2:30 From the Jew is Born the Anti-Semite
Jessica Patey, University of Lethbridge

- Session 3D Creating and Recreating Religion & Culture AH TBA**
 Presiding: James Linville, University of Lethbridge
- 1:00 - 1:30 Cute Animals and the Destruction of The Earth: An Analysis of Children's Biblical Literature
Rechele Korbie, University of Lethbridge
- 1:30 - 2:00 Uses of the Secularization of South Asian Religion in the Creation of Identity
Katherine Christianson, University of Lethbridge
- 2:00 - 2:30 Psychology of Obfuscation: The Intersection of Scientology and Modern Science
Tyler Greening, Champlain University

Break: 15 Minutes

- Session 4A The Buddhist Mummies of North Japan AH116**
 Presiding: John Harding, University of Lethbridge
- 2:45 - 4:30 Shayne Dahl, producer, will introduce the film and discuss it after the screening with Kaelah Collins, Jessica Knoop, Brittany Lewis, and Dillon St. Jean of the University of Lethbridge.

- Session 4B Women in the Early Church 2 AH117**
 Presiding: Tom Robinson, University of Lethbridge
- 2:45 - 3:15 An Examination of Women's Roles and Influence in the Formative Years of Christianity
Athena Manolagos, University of Lethbridge
- 3:15 - 3:45 Virgins and Prostitutes, Married and Martyred Women of Distinction in the Early Christian Movement
Joey Grace, University of Lethbridge

Dinner (Reservations Required)

6:00 p.m. Ballroom A, SU300A, Student Union Building

Keynote Address: ANNE MOORE, UNIVERISTY OF CALGARY
 8:00 PM

The Return of the Biblical Epic

Sunday, April 30, 2017

Session 5A

9:00 - 10:30 **The Early Church 2** **AH116**
Presider: Anne Moore, University of Calgary

A Stark Examination: A Panel Discussion on Rodney Starks' Urban Thesis

Athena Manolakos, Wynona Nethercott, Jessica Patey, and Madison Stocker, University of Lethbridge

Session 5B **Ritual Studies** **AH117**

Presider: John Harding, University of Lethbridge

9:00 - 9:30 Ritual Women: 19th Century Missionary Perspectives of Chinese Sacred Space
Anne Baycroft, University of Saskatchewan

9:30 - 10:00 Dura Europos: The Case for Direct Art Viewing When Investigating Early Christian Ritual
Rebecca Christian, University of Calgary

10:00 - 10:30 Dasain Festivals of Nepal: Diverging Traditions Between the Newars' Religious Practices and More Secular Celebrations
Erin Davis, University of Lethbridge

Session 5C **Kabbalah** **AH118**

Presiding: James Linville, University of Lethbridge

9:00 - 9:30 The Lover and the Beloved: God and Israel in the Zohar
Nilou Davoudi, University of Calgary

9:30 - 10:00 General Complexity of the Zohar
Justin Nadeau, University of Calgary

10:00 - 10:30 N/A

Break 15 minutes

Session 6 **Life, Death and Religious Change** **AH116**

Presiding: Tom Robinson

10:45 - 11:15 Christian Responses to Yoga in the West
Kevin Warkentin, Andrews University

11:15 - 11:45 Spiritualizing the Internet: Online Buddhist Communities and the Sangha
Rutika Gandhi, University of Lethbridge

11:45 - 12:15 Death in the Age of Social Media
Nilou Davoudi, University of Calgary

12:15 Closing Comments: Tom Robinson

Abstracts

Ritual Women: 19th Century Missionary Perspectives of Chinese Sacred Space

Anne Baycroft, U of Saskatchewan

This paper explores late nineteenth century narratives of Chinese sacred space as revealed through American Protestant missionary writings. Through surveying the journals and writings of select missionary accounts I uncover a colourful and unique depiction of Chinese religion on the ground in Zhejiang province 浙江省, China. These writings depict the religious dispositions and ritual practices of Chinese women—a demographic that is largely underrepresented by scholars of Chinese religion. This paper reveals the first hand encounters of American missionaries with Buddhist ritual performances, temple festivals, and lay religious life. Aside from the resident monks of temple complexes, women are often described as the dominant group seen performing rituals within Buddhist sacred space. What's more, missionary accounts tell us about the rituals these women performed, the materials they used, and the religious services they indulged in. I argue that this information is crucial to studies of religion in contemporary China. The economic growth of the late twentieth century has led to the (re)construction of many Chinese sacred sites. As a result, most sacred space in China now doubles as a tourist attraction. Chinese Buddhists must now negotiate sacred space amidst its changing purpose and shifting identity. The historical perspectives of China's lay Buddhist community revealed through missionary accounts can be used to further our understanding of the function and role of sacred space within modern China.

A Well-Balanced Relationship: The Sámi Key to Health

Kathryn Bauer, U of Calgary

How are notions of health understood from a relational worldview? Indigenous societies place great significance on the balance of relationships between healer and patient, illness and cure. This research investigates health beliefs and healing practices among the Sámi, an indigenous population spanning northern Scandinavia and Russia. It highlights the importance of these relationships both from a historical and modern perspective. The value of relationism in general has often been, and continues to be, lost on followers of the dominant Western worldview. In the health context, this has resulted in unnecessary obstacles during the expansion of Westernized healthcare into the Sámi region - 'unnecessary' because of their potential to complement each other rather than work in opposition. The aim of this research is to present Sámi relationism in a manner comprehensible to external worldviews and demonstrate the integral role of traditional healers in maintaining the stability of their local communities.

All My Relations: Yup'ik Ontology and Ceremonial Traditions in the 1800s

Sean Corey Binder, U of Calgary

The study of Indigenous spirituality within Western academic scholarship was, and often continues to be, interpreted through a mechanistic perspective that cannot sufficiently accommodate the Indigenous notions of time, reality, personhood, and the environment. As a result, Indigenous beliefs, traditions, and ways-of-life have usually been misconstrued and misunderstood, exacerbated by a long legacy of colonialism throughout the world. This paper argues that, unlike the dominant Western society that hegemonically sets normative standards of moral value, Indigenous communities prioritize a relational ontology that ascribes "life," spirit, and a sense of "personhood" to much, if not all, of creation. As an example, this paper highlights the traditional hunting and dance practices of the Indigenous Yup'ik of Alaska to demonstrate an ontological perspective that emphasizes the interconnected relationships they share with the land, animals, and spiritual world. The Yup'ik beliefs and practices will be analyzed from a process-relational perspective to better understand Indigenous ways-of-knowing and being. Contemporary process-relational philosophy emphasizes the interconnected nature of reality, pan-experientialism, and a panentheistic theology, thus establishing parallels with Indigenous ontology and epistemology that allow a more appropriate and honouring means to re-interpret Indigenous spirituality for western society.

Dura Europos: The Case for Direct Art Viewing When Investigating Early Christian Ritual

Rebecca Christian, U of Calgary

The contentious political situation in Syria makes on-site investigation of Dura Europos impossible. The distance between scholar and site highly limits the perspective one may use when examining this crucial city, and its many sites of religious activity. These limitations are clearly felt when one wishes to analyze the connection between place and ritual. The remains of the Durene Christian House Church, for example, have been most frequently claimed by art history, due to the difficulties of viewing the ritual space. However, my own experience with the exhibited remains at the site has shown that these limitations do not preclude ritual investigation. The following presentation will put forth my observations of the Durene Christian wall frescos from the perspective of ritual, as opposed to art history. In attempting to examine the embodied usage of the site, I have found that certain, critical observations can only be made when one is physically present amongst the remains, however changed, or decontextualized their original location may be. In my presentation, I will address the difficulties in exhibiting the Dura Europos Christian house church, the discoveries made from direct viewing of the frescos, and the benefit of these observations when investigating ritual, place, and embodiment. As a case study, I will discuss the performative viewing as the baptismal font is approached. I argue that this moment allows for a high degree of stimuli that evokes major themes of the Biblical narrative, which are then embodied through performance. I argue as well that themes present in the baptistry art work to reinforce Christian identity to the other participants in the ritual, aiding in the solidification of a ritual identity.

Uses of the Secularization of South Asian Religion in the Creation of Identity

Katherine Christianson, U of Lethbridge

The purpose of this paper is to identify the historical foundation of the secularized appropriation of elements of South Asian religion, as well as the present-day purposes and uses of such secularization in the creation of identity in Western popular culture. Cultural appropriation has been a topic of heated discussion in recent years, and regardless of the various stances taken on this subject, it must be acknowledged that this phenomena serves a function. Through case studies linking the current Western uses of South Asian religion to historical schools of thought centered on rationalism, it is apparent that motifs of South Asian religion come to symbolize a broad sense of non-denominational spirituality. However, these secularized forms of South Asian spiritual imagery are also re-appropriated by South Asians both in the subcontinent and in diaspora as forms of resistance, national patrimony, and markers of modernity. By examining these various identities through both historical and modern theoretical lenses, the uses of secularized South Asian religious imagery are shown to be culturally grounded, dynamic, and purposeful.

The Self as One: Non-dual Notions of Selfhood in 'Aṭṭār's Conference of the Birds

Bruce A. Coates, U of Lethbridge

The nature of the 'self' is perhaps one of the most widely debated concepts in human history, one on par in popularity with other concepts such as 'God.' The concept of 'selfhood,' whether real or not, cannot be ignored with any intellectual integrity, since it is completely tied up with the human psyche. To deny that there is a sense of identity in our experiences is futile, for, even if this sense is illusory, there is still nonetheless this sense. And this sense is precisely what theologians and philosophers are interested in examining when they endeavour to examine the 'self.'

This essay is an articulation of my understanding of Islamic mystical philosophy in response to the question of the 'self,' based on the poetic epic Conference of the Birds by 'Aṭṭār of Nishapur (d. 1220). The aim of the paper is to accurately present and elaborate upon the nature of selfhood in Islamic mysticism and philosophy with a focus on 'Aṭṭār's epic poem.

Discovering Who": Inuit Naming Practices and Beliefs

Jane Crichton, U of Calgary

The Inuit naming process is a complex, spiritual and practical system that effectively reconstitutes the realities of Inuit personhood, relationships and community. Naming is central to Inuit culture, as names

bring the essential nature and abilities of personhood to an individual. The Inuit understand the name is the person, and they discover the correct name when naming an infant.

A deeper exploration of the Inuit naming practices and understandings through a relational lens reveals some of the ontological realities of the Inuit people, by recognizing the cosmic underpinnings of a name. The Inuit understanding of naming is process-relational and incorporates a metaphysical ontology that prioritizes the relationship over the individual, interconnectedness over separateness, and process over fixed entities. By delving into the naming process, we can better understand how the Inuit understand their world.

This paper will examine how Inuit describe their understanding of “what is a name”, and in doing so show a markedly different worldview than the traditional western perspective. Recognizing this fundamental aspect of life and identity to the Inuit casts a new light on the colonial actions that have altered the Inuit Indigenous way of life. Ultimately, colonial epistemic violence demonstrates why it is essential to explore an Indigenous cultural practice using their own perspective and way of knowing.

Perceptions of Wellness in the Bhutanese Community of Lethbridge, Alberta: Exploring Religious and Cultural Community Supports

Erin Davis, U of Lethbridge

Religious communities often provide significant social support for newly settled immigrants and refugees who resettle in North America. However, ethnic and religious communities can have the opposite effect by isolating individuals and making it harder for them to adapt to the new culture and their new home. Bhutanese refugees now resettled in Lethbridge, Alberta have built a strong community that continues to practice important Nepali religious celebrations and customs. Even though experiences of forced migration, refugee camps and exposure to the challenges of immigration place the Bhutanese refugees of Lethbridge, Alberta at risk for lower quality of life, similar wellness scores between the Bhutanese community of Lethbridge and a local cohort group suggest that the strong religious community that the Bhutanese have built in Lethbridge, in combination with local community supports put in place for Bhutanese refugees, have been an intermediary for some of the negative effects of refugees and immigrant’s experiences. Sixty-three Bhutanese participants and 96 controls from the University of Lethbridge faculty and staff completed The Perceived Wellness Survey (PWS) created by Dr. Troy Adams, to investigate overall perceived wellness through six sub-categories (psychological, emotional, social, physical, spiritual and intellectual). There were no significant group differences in overall wellness, however, the Bhutanese group had higher physical and the controls higher intellectual wellness scores. Demographic and external factors did not predict overall wellness scores. However, physical activity and age predicted some of the variance in social wellness scores of the Bhutanese group and physical activity predicted some variance in physical wellness scores of the controls. This lack of differences between the scores of the control and Bhutanese groups suggests that the Bhutanese refugees of Lethbridge are thriving. However, future research should use more objective measures of wellness and investigation of more intrinsic predictors of perceived wellness within the community.

Dasain Festivals of Nepal: Diverging Traditions Between the Newars' Religious Practices and More Secular Celebrations

Erin Davis, U of Lethbridge

Dasain (Dashain) or Mohani is the largest, longest and most important festival in Nepal. In other areas of South Asia, the Dasain festival is also known as the Durga Puja or Navaratri and is a distinctly Hindu festival. However, in Nepal, Dasain festivals are ritually pluralistic, mostly filled with Hindu traditions, while incorporating Buddhism, secular celebratory practices, and indigenous ancestor worship. How Dasain is celebrated is often determined by what is prominent within the different regions of Nepal. For example, in the Kathmandu Valley, Newars celebrate Dasain in distinctly different ways than more secular individuals or groups. For the Newars, Dasain is a religious holiday, where festivities are filled with indigenous ancestor worship mixed with Hindu practices. For others, Dasain is celebrated predominantly as a national holiday, scattered with religious customs from Hinduism, Buddhism and Animism. Others tie Dasain festivals to agricultural celebrations, with festivities converging upon the end of the monsoon season and the

completion of harvesting rice crops. No matter where the Dasian festivals are observed in Nepal one can be sure to witness diverse celebrations incorporating pluralistic customs and traditions.

Death in the Age of Social Media

Nilou Davoudi, U of Calgary

In recent years, humans have created astounding technologies that have allowed them to design children, modify personalities, and create highly advanced prosthetics. And yet, death is the supreme anxiety and technology has not been able to calm that angst. This paper focuses on the impact that Facebook memorialization pages have on the human ability to come to terms with the death of a loved one. The texts *Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker and *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* by Stefan Herbrechter will be used as central sources in the examination of death, posthumanism and what it is like to die in the age of social media. The role of God in this complicated relationship between man, technology, and death will also be explored. In this framework, the Sufi tradition on the meditation on death in understanding how Sufis use contemplation on death as a way to deny death and cope with their immortality by welcoming death and suppressing their anxiety will be compared to Facebook and the use of Facebook memorialization pages.

The Lover and the Beloved: God and Israel in the Zohar

Nilou Davoudi, U of Calgary

The Jewish tradition of kabbalah first appeared in the thirteenth century and contained a doctrine of the sefirot which provided “a way of understanding how God created and continues to govern the world, and as a practical guide for humans to influence the metaphysical realms through their observance of the Torah’s commandments” (Segal 2009, 86). The root word of ‘kabbalah’ means “receive” (87) and stems from the notion that one can “move from the world of ordinary perception to the core of reality” (Nash 1983, 173). Kabbalah is not defined as mysticism because the ultimate goal of kabbalah is not to experience mystical unity with the divine but rather to provide “interaction with the lower manifestations of the divine emanations” (Segal 2009, 191). One of the fundamental texts of kabbalah is the Zohar. The book was originally written in the Aramaic language and contains a vast amount of imagery and symbolism as well as “many aspects of traditional Jewish religious teachings” (94). One key symbolic representation within the Zohar is the tenth sefirah, the Shekhinah. This paper will study the symbolic representation of the Shekhinah as well as the relationship between the Shekhinah and God particularly as it is depicted in the Zohar. The specific passage “Adam’s Sin” (Matt 1983, 54) and the chapter “God, Israel, and Shekhinah” (154) will be explored.

The Three Yaqeen: Ali Nur al-Din al-Yashruti's Approach to Knowledge, Vision and Truth of Certainty

Ali Adel Fares, U of Exeter

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief biographical account of Shayk Ali Nur al-Din al-Yashruti (d. 1899), then proceed in exploring his teachings regarding the concepts of certainty (*yaqeen*).

The Shadhiliyya Yashrutiyya Sufi order (*tariqa*) originated in 19th century Palestine with the arrival of the order’s founder, Shaykh Ali Nur al-Din al-Yashruti. His revivification of classical Sufism in Acre, Palestine was successful in part by his paradoxical modernist approaches to orthodox Islamic thought. His teachings quickly spread throughout the Levant, attracting individuals from various strata of society, including notable religious judges (*mufti* s.) and scholars (*‘alam* s.). One of the main teachings Shaykh al-Yashruti disseminated was the concepts of certainty in relation to well established Islamic concepts such as divine fate (*qadha*), destiny (*qadar*) and the primordial Muhammadean light. Shaykh al-Yashruti taught that one could change his or her fate and destiny through approaching and or revealing one’s inner Mohammadean light, and that this could be accomplished through one’s progression in the realms of certainty.

Seek Nothing, Find Enlightenment: A Review of the Teachings of Ramesh Balsekar

Taylor Findlay, U of Lethbridge

Modern Nondual Spirituality (MNS) is the philosophical system that results from the migration, appropriation and expansion of ideas that can be said to find their origins in some of the first great civilizations of the world. At its core, it is based upon achieving a psychological state wherein conceptual dualities dissolve, allowing the practitioner to awake from the illusion of viewing themselves as distinct from others. The idea of this kind of awakening is, of course, far from modern and thus, the teachers and advocates of these philosophical doctrines have tasked themselves with re-situating these ancient paths onto new and varying sociocultural terrain. Of course, with this transmission of ideas from one culture and time-period to another, it becomes almost inevitable that there will be at least of some degree of departure from tradition and advocates of the traditional articulation and practice of Nondual wisdom have argued that modern teachers such as Ramesh Balsekar, the man with whom I will be mainly concerned, have deviated to the point of misinforming and misleading seekers of nondual wisdom and enlightenment. In what follows, I intend to provide a comparison between modern and traditional nondual teachings in order to better examine what both bridges and divides them. I will do this by expounding the teachings of Ramesh Balsekar as well as his modern influences—mapping where the newly carved paths both align with and diverge from those that were set in place a thousand years ago. This exposition of Balsekar's teachings will include an overview of his main influences and what are emphasized in his work as core teachings, an analysis of his interpretations of nonduality and the enlightened state and of what he both suggests and denounces in terms of the means for enlightenment prescribed to his disciples. This will be followed by an inquiry into specific criticisms that have been directed toward Balsekar's teachings and a final word on how we might interpret the shaping of his spiritual legacy.

Consider the Lilies... Women's agency and the act of dressing religiously

Hannah Forbes, U of Calgary

Religious dress, a relatively new branch of material culture and religious studies, explores topics of gender and control as played out on the bodies of religious adherents. One of the most prolific authors on the subject is Linda B. Arthur, who in multiple works explores religious dress in the West and the effects that religious dress has on women. Arthur argues that the fundamental purpose of women's religious dress is the physical, emotional, and sexual control of female members by a patriarchal religion. The notion that religious dress is "crucially about the control of female sexuality by men exercising patriarchal power" (Arthur 1999, 1-2) provides the premise for Arthur (and her contributors) in her book *Religion, Dress and the Body*. However, by limiting their lens to focus on patriarchal oppression in religious dress, Arthur and her contributors ignore women's agency and voluntary religious expression in the act of dressing. I will examine the works of Arthur and Susan Moller Okin, renowned feminist scholar and political philosopher, and compare their focus on the patriarchal control of women's bodies with alternative assessments from scholars Martha C. Nussbaum and Azizah Y. al-Hibri. I will examine each scholar's attention to the themes of control and gender in order to establish the importance of women's agency when dressing religiously in the West.

Spiritualizing the Internet: Online Buddhist Communities and the Sangha

Rutika Gandhi, U of Lethbridge

Among many other developments, the internet has also become a hub for religious social interactions. Online communities within the virtual worlds of Second Life, as well as forums like E-Sangha have allowed practitioners from around the world to be part of a larger Buddhist community. This paper explores the role that cyberspace plays in conceptualizing Buddhist identity and authority, which are no longer tied to or limited by geographical locations. A closer analysis of these online communities also reveals the ways in which the presence of such sacred spaces allows the participants to practice Buddhism in ways that both affect and replicate the influx of global "Modern Buddhism."

Virgins and Prostitutes, Married and Martyred Women of Distinction in the Early Christian Movement

Joey Grace, U of Lethbridge

Women in the early Christian church were generally thought of as inferior and prevented from performing or aspiring to roles of importance in the community. Early patristic Christian writers declared that their behavior would either be a positive or a negative example to the larger community and thus they were often told to portray virtuous roles such as chastity, silence, and obedience. Yet there is evidence that women participated in important and authoritative roles in the early church which played an active role in the spread of the Christian movement. The early Christian church has left an intriguing and diversified heritage of faithful women. They range from chaste virgins to promiscuous prostitutes, virtuous wives to valorous martyrs who laid down their lives for their belief in a man called Jesus. In social systems where the lives of women were largely defined and constrained, how did the rise of Christianity change the roles of these four groups of women in the Roman Empire?

Psychology of Obfuscation: The Intersection of Scientology and Modern Science

Tyler Greening, Champlain College

The Church of Scientology shrouds itself in mystery. Even for those who are a part of the community, they are kept in the dark about nearly everything that goes on. While these people spend a good chunk of their time recruiting new members and attempting to move forward in their own journey towards clarity, most of the Scientology community isn't exactly sure what each step of the process entails specifically until they get there.

One of the more well known facts about Scientology lies right there in its name: science! Scientology claims to be a religion based off of scientific evidence discovered by L. Ron Hubbard himself. In fact, the Church of Scientology website states specifically, "Scientology is not a dogmatic religion in which one is asked to accept anything on faith alone. On the contrary, one discovers for oneself that the principles of Scientology are true by applying its principles and observing or experiencing the results." However, upon digging a little further, it becomes apparent that Scientology isn't based off any actual facts or data, it's based off of what Mr. Hubbard wanted to write about, which was Dianetics.

Despite claiming to be a religion based off science, Scientologists vehemently oppose modern medicine. L. Ron Hubbard made outlandish claims about medicine, specifically focusing on psychologists as the problem. He blamed them for World War I, the rise of Hitler, and the church later went on to claim that psychologists were behind 9/11. Though many of these claims have attempted to be swept under the rug by Scientologists, their opinion on psychology and its many forms is apparent.

Under my Umbrella: Religious Allusions in the Resident Evil Movie Franchise

Kimberley Humphries, U of Lethbridge

In the year 2002 Paul W.S. Anderson released the first Resident Evil movie in the franchise, which would be followed by five more films. We find our main character, and heroine, Alice in a battle against the Umbrella corporation which has become a ubiquitous name across America and the world. The Umbrella corporation was secretly dealing military strength biological weapons, including the T-Virus, made originally as a medication for people with cell destructing diseases. The T-Virus caused dead cells to reanimate, meaning the dead would come back to life. As Alice fights the undead on her journey to destroy what little is left of Umbrella after the world fell into apocalypse, we see a Messianic figure arise inside of her. In this presentation, I will be analyzing the religious allusions made in the movie series such as Messianic tropes, Judas figures, and religious symbols used throughout. I plan on establishing a religious background to the storyline and characters.

But Who Prays for Satan? Iblis' Origins in Sufi Islamic Thought

Kimberley Humphries, U of Lethbridge

Iblis, Satan, in Islamic thought has been explored multidimensionally. God created Adam out of earth and called for the angels to come to him. God told that Adam was to be bowed to, however Iblis was prideful and refused to bow. Iblis was created from fire and therefore believed he was more important than Adam. It was this act of apparent disobedience that cursed Iblis with being cast out. There are different renditions of why Iblis was present at the unveiling of Adam, why it was that Iblis refused to bow to Adam, as well as what type of spirit Iblis is (Jinn or Angel). This theological problem has been explored most notably by Sufi Al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, who depicted Iblis as God's tragic lover. Iblis' origins have been questioned considerably in Sufi thought and literature. The question of the differences between Angels and Jinn is a main factor in establishing Iblis' place among God. Why and how Iblis ended up in the company of Angels and of God when God created Adam has gone unanswered, allowing for several interpretations to remain. In this paper, I will explore the differences of Angels and Jinn in Islamic theology, as well as investigate several explanations for Iblis' origins, existence, and placement among the Angels in Heaven. My focal point of research will be the book "The TaSin of Before-Time and Ambiguity" written by Mansur Hallaj, along with many other interpretations.

The Way Gave Birth to Unity: Exploring Classical Taoist Literature as a Resource for Modern Feminist Thought

Jessica Knoop, U of Lethbridge

Feminism has rolled through our social structures in numerous waves over the last century and with the current state of global affairs, it is perhaps now more necessary than ever to strengthen and support modern feminist thought (MFT). This paper presents major themes in early Taoist literature to accord parallels with MFT, as well as addressing potential concerns regarding the applicability of the resulting implications in the modern era. With an emphasis on Third-wave Feminism's roots in Intersectionalism and poststructuralist theory, this paper argues the compatibility of the two philosophies based on the confirmation of the following primary observations: Taoism has long been an opposing force to societal norms, it values the diverse and natural state of humans, and it offers a feminist system of spirituality via its inclusive central principle of the Tao. The results of this explication are in favor of the compatibility of Taoist philosophy, as presented in classical Taoist literature, as a resource for MFT.

Cute Animals and the Destruction of The Earth: An Analysis of Children's Biblical Literature

Rechele Korbie, U of Lethbridge

Children's bibles have been produced since the early 20th century, and for as long as these books have been produced political and theological teachings have been woven into their pages. This form of literature can be divided into two groups: those intended for mainstream Christian audiences and those aimed at young earth creationists (YEC). The bibles meant for mainstream consumption are often worded softly, portraying god as a divine parental figure with allegorical messages pulled from the creation stories. The second introduces pro creationist ideas as well as political and theological doctrine such as traditional gender roles, heterosexual marriage, and makes YEC a necessary component to the Christian salvation story. Various other teachings reveal themselves in peculiar ways throughout the different texts recognizing serious biblical questions. These texts often do not shy away from biblical controversy but instead aim their attention to dispelling question and alternative reading; arming both child and parent with theological doctrine against what they perceive as corruption. This includes examples of ambiguity of the text, old earth and theological evolution interpretation, and even delving into the very complex realm of sex and incest in the Old Testament. Ultimately, both examples of children's biblical literature are created to introduce teachings of either allegory or theology to children—the ideas and concepts of their guardians, congregation, and society.

Examination of Post Humanism From The Position of Rights, Responsibility, and Expectations

Victoria Jean Layton, U of Lethbridge

Post humanism has been a great source of study under popular entertainment sources of science fiction books and movies. Under the guise of such sources of popular entertainment, the question of what rights, responsibilities, and expectations are ideal in a post humanist stage of humanity is presented. Films and novels such as director Jay Martin and author James Patterson's Maximum Ride film and novel series, Robin Wasserman's Chasing Yesterday series, and director Joe Johnson's Captain America: The First Avenger are great examples for audiences and analysts alike to examine the results and different implications of several scenarios of responsibility, rights, and expectations. Each consideration within the sources of popular entertainment is displayed by several categorizations of humanity, as well as that of the creations of a post humanist era. For the purposes of analysis, the term post humanism refers to an era of the world in which some individuals are either taken, or created, beyond the context of what would be considered the norm. With the new category, post humanist creations are separated from their creators in that they are deemed to be creations of humanity, not through the creation of deities or evolution but rather through technology.

An Examination of Women's Roles and Influence in the Formative Years of Christianity

Athena Manolakos, U of Lethbridge

The hegemonic narrative of Western civilization is arguably overwhelmingly clouded by a patriarchal bias. As a result, compiling historical evidence that is both illuminating and unbiased from literature that examines women's involvement in history often proves to be difficult. As anticipated, the study of women's involvement in the early Christian movement is not without this complexity. Acknowledging this obstacle, Monique Alexander notes that "the presence of women is almost always perceived indirectly [...]. Women's voices are rarely heard [...] [and] the only vision of women to which we have access to is the idealized, normative one put forward by clerics and monks". For this reason, the examination of historical material requires an in-depth analysis of the social setting for the period in question. The examination of the social setting surrounding the women involved in the early Christian ministry provides us with much to reflect on. The chief questions surrounding this subject that I will investigate in my research are: Why did women join the early Christian movement? What sort of roles did women have within the movement? and lastly, How did women influence the view of the Christian movement by non-Christians? Female martyrs, deaconesses, prophetesses, virgins, and widows are just a few of the roles of women in early Christianity that can be examined in order to hypothesize the answers to the aforementioned questions. In my research, I will examine how these feminine portrayals influenced or contributed to the growth of Christianity, and how these roles would have been perceived by non-Christians in the early years of the movement when the Roman Empire was largely pagan, polytheistic, and patriarchal.

General Complexity of the Zohar

Justin Nadeau, U of Calgary

The Zohar is a sacred text most commonly associated with Kabbalistic Judaism, or Jewish mysticism. Moses de Leon, a 13th c. Spanish Rabbi, is credited with writing the Zohar using midrash interpretation. The Zohar itself can be classified not as a mystic treatise, but more as Talmudic midrash. Midrash is a Hebrew word that describes Jewish exegesis, and is defined by Matt as an ancient technique of searching for meaning of various passages. When reading the Zohar, it is easy to see how it favours the esoteric, allegorical and the deep interpretive methods when it interprets the Torah. Complex language is used in the Zohar to engage the reader to actively participate in its interpretation so that they can understand the truth of the divine, but also to separate the devoted Kabbalists from the casual readers. The two major Kabbalist scholars that created methods for interpreting the Zohar, and in turn Torah, are Rabbi Moses Cordovero and Rabbi Isaac Luria. Cordovero's method recognizes symbolic patterns of the Zohar that refer to the ten sefirot of the divine. Luria, conversely, sees each symbolic reference as a unique divine aspect and developed the complex Lurianic method. Cordovero's method has been adopted by Daniel Matt, a leading scholar and translator of the Zohar. However, there are still alternative Kabbalistic interpretations for the Zohar. The major difference between the two is the distinct levels of the divine structure to which

they refer. These methods are used by Zohar commentators and are necessary to understand when analyzing the complexity of the Zohar.

Monasticism as a Proponent of Early Christianity: Justifying its Qualitative Character through the Life and Works of Early Monas

Wynona Marie Nethercott, U of Lethbridge

How does monasticism fit into the urban versus rural profile of Christianity? What made early monks like Antony and Pachomius choose solitude over the comforts of their homes?

By examining the lives of early monastic leaders, this paper explores monasticism at its core; monasticism as an intangible product of Early Christianity—or indeed of Christianity as a whole. Through the stories of these early monks I seek to justify their qualitative behaviours—their qualitative way of life.

From the Jew is Born the Anti-Semite

Jessica Patey, U of Lethbridge

This paper focusses on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first three hundred years after the death of Jesus. Specifically it looks at when Christianity stopped being Judaism and evolved into its own movement. I argue for an early split between the two religions. As Gentile converts made their way into the new religion Jews steadily left, unable to accept the Christological focus and the shift away from traditional Jewish practices. I look at writers such as Pliny the Younger in order to prove that the split between the two religions had occurred within the first hundred years at least. This separation allowed for Gentiles to take over the preaching of the message and with this came the movement toward anti-Semitism. Gentile converts did not share the same respect for the history and literature of the Jews. They were therefore able to manipulate it in order to perpetuate the newly distinguished Christianity. From this split Christians made Judaism into its “other” and would continually place themselves on the moral, religious, and cultural high ground compared to that of the Jews.

A Stark Examination: A Discussion of the Urban Thesis

Jessica Patey, Athena Manolakos, Wynona Nethercott, and Madison Stocker, U of Lethbridge

Jessica Patey, Athena Manolakos, Wynona Nethercott, and Madison Stocker will present on Rodney Stark's analysis of the Urban Thesis. This panel will discuss the numbers and statistics, conversion and class, women, and Jews. We will explain how it relates to the Urban Thesis and the importance of Stark to that discussion.

A “Traditionalist” Critique of the Modern World: Nasr’s Knowledge and the Sacred

Conner Peta, U of Lethbridge

According to school of “Traditionalism” (with which the late Mircea Eleade was also affiliated), the modern world is in a crisis, evidenced by gross economic disparities between the rich and the poor, the ecological crisis, and the threat of nuclear holocaust. Using the arguments of one of the preeminent representatives of this school of thought, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, as outlined in his Gifford Lectures, later published as Knowledge and the Sacred, as well as those thinkers to whom Nasr is himself indebted, such René Guénon, this paper will explain how it is that for the Traditionalists the problems of the modern world stem from what is believed to be the process by which knowledge has been “desacralized,” stripped of its sacred origins, and reduced to what is accessible through a model of scientific reductionism. The paper will also explain how for Nasr and the Traditionalists, “Scientia Sacra,” which is believed to be knowledge of Absolute Reality, can return “promethean man”, the creature who is preoccupied with what is apparent in our world, back to Absolute reality and the meaning of existence. Until “promethean” human beings return to their natural form, the world will continue, or so the argument runs, to be plagued by the problems that were originally caused through our separation from Absolute Reality and the concomitant “desacralization” of knowledge.

Star Wars: Influencing and Taking Influence from Religion Since 1977

Jenna Simoneau, U of Lethbridge

The Star Wars franchise has had an unprecedented effect on Western popular culture since the release of the first film in 1977. This paper examines the Star Wars franchise and its relationship to the religious world, including how it has been influenced by the presence of religion, as well as how it itself has influenced the religious beliefs and practices of groups of people today. Firstly, it seems that the narrative structure of the films features shared characteristics with the apocalyptic themes of the Judeo-Christian traditions. As well, the practices of the fictional Jedi Order seem to borrow heavily from Buddhist ideas and philosophies, with notions such as mindfulness and compassion being shared by both groups. Lastly, there is the matter of how the influence of the Star Wars franchise has surpassed its popular culture sphere, and has begun dabbling in the realm of religious belief and practice. The rise of Jediism, what Cusack refers to as an 'invented religion,' began with an email campaign, and ended with thousands of people across New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the U.K. identifying themselves as Jedi on a 2001 Census. The sensation of Jediism, as well as the thematic similarities between the films, Buddhism, and the Judeo-Christian tradition, exemplifies how the Star Wars franchise both inspires religion and takes inspiration from religion, and emphasizes its connection to the religious world.

Voice of the Valley Stream: Nishitani Keiji; the Man and his Thought

Dillon St. Jean, U of Lethbridge

Nishitani Keiji was a 20th-century Japanese Philosopher and Buddhist. His teacher, Nishida Kitarō, was the first in a line of thinkers now known as the "Kyoto School." Nishitani is the author of many philosophical tomes including *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, *On Buddhism*, and his masterpiece *Religion and Nothingness*. Nishitani is an interesting example of where the East meets the West. Not only was Nishitani practicing Zen throughout his life, he also studied under Martin Heidegger for two years in Germany. Nishitani's position is one of synthesis between the different modes of thought between the East and the West. Nishitani's philosophical position known as the "standpoint of sunyata" is a position that demands the respect of, and a position in, the large project of global thought. My paper aims to serve as an introduction, or, to borrow the Japanese term *nyūmon* (entry gate), into the world of Nishitani. In this paper, I attempt to answer "Who was Nishitani?" and "What did he say?"

Mammon or God?: The Class Structure of Early Christianity

Madison Stocker, U of Lethbridge

This paper will be an exploration into the early Christian church, looking at the relationship between wealthy and poor Christian converts. I am going to be examining money and contrasting the importance of money to the early Christian movement with their belief in asceticism, making my points using biblical sources. Further analysis of the class structure of early Christianity, and the dissection of different class groups will show evidence as to why members of these economic strata may want to convert; briefly discussing the role that plagues, and illness had on conversions. In conclusion, I will show why it was most likely the members of the lower and lower-middle class who made up the early church, but unfortunately, like most sources on early Christianity, the evidence is not as clear as one would like.

Are personality traits and degree of religiosity in Judaism associated?

Lauren Vomberg, U of Lethbridge

In a world where religious freedom is considered a fundamental right, research linking personality and religion has become increasingly popular. However, most research in this field has either focused on common North American religions (e.g., Christianity) or compared personality traits across religions. Although Judaism has been included in these comparisons, our study is the first to investigate personality differences across sects of Judaism with increasing degrees of religiosity (ranging from Non-Practicing, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, to Lubavitch). We asked the following two research questions; (1) Do individuals who self-identify with certain sects of Judaism differ in personality? (2) Is the size of the city of residence associated with the degree of religiosity in Judaism? We used various social media outlets to administer the HEXACO Personality Inventory (measuring Honesty/Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion,

Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, and Altruism), the Religious Orientation Scale, and the Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism on a sample of 186 self-identified Jewish individuals. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 74, and lived in different cities across the USA and Canada. We found no statistically significant differences in any of the personality scores across sects of Judaism. These results are not consistent with previous research linking personality and degree of religiosity in other religions, a discrepancy that may be due to differences in belief between Judaism and other religions. We found no statistically significant correlation between city size and degree of religiosity in Judaism. Future research could include a greater selection of sects within Judaism for participants to identify with, as well as the creation of a more accurate measurement of religiosity in relation to Judaism.

Christian Responses to Yoga in the West

Kevin Warkentin, Andrews University

Christians in the West have responded to the influx of Eastern religious practices and yoga in particular in a variety of ways. Christians are not simply for or against yoga, they are for or against for important reasons. For some Christians, there is no intrinsic spiritual element to yoga and for others there is. For some Christians the spiritual element in yoga is always evil; for others, it can be determined by their choice of focus while doing yoga. Christians decide how they respond to yoga based on their perception of the spiritual element involved.