

Oxford Symposium on Religious Studies

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The Dilemma of Democracy in the Thought of Two Muslim Thinkers

Keywords: Democracy, Iqbal, Qutb, Islam, Political Thought

When Murad Hofmann dismissively states that Muhammad Iqbal and Sayyid Qutb are two Muslim thinkers who have rejected democracy, he does not elaborate much on their rationales for taking that stand. The aim of this paper is to provide a deeper insight into that judgement by investigating first how accurate it is, and second the relevant texts and context that might have led two pivotal contemporary thinkers to swerve against the dream of all nations in modern times. It argues that their rejection does not issue from lack of knowledge of the principles and mechanisms of Western democracy; it is the direct result of getting too close to it and thus learning through first-hand experience the limitations of its paradigms. The conclusion the paper reaches is that they are not doubtful of the higher ideals and values of democracy; instead, issuing from a pseudo-Platonic perception, they are certain of modern democracy's thwarted historical reality.

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Religion or Culture? Reconsidering Islam in Bangladesh Context

Keywords: Religion, Islam, Culture, Muslim Culture, Bangladesh, Nomenclature.

In accepting Islam, a Muslim often accepts some sort of beliefs and religious rituals and adopts a new way of life, a new form of culture. Here comes the question: cultures and lifestyles adopted in the name of Islam, are they really Islamic, or is it just a phenomenon? Do they have any roots in the religion, or are they just adopted as a culture within the Muslim community? In search of those questions' answers, this study attempts to analyze the position of culture in Islam. Considering the topic's wideness, we will only examine a single, but important, culture in Bangladesh: naming Muslim children with Arabic words. In Bangladesh, Muslims usually name their children with Arabic, in some cases Persian, words. It would be very fine if there would not be a different colour in the other corner of the picture regarding Bengali names. Within the Muslim religious community there, Bengali names are not only neglected, but more than that,

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they are considered un-Islamic in some cases. By examining the Bengali Muslim nomenclature, this study intends to find if naming children with Arabic words has any obligation in the religion or if it is just a cultural phenomena; which, in turn, will let us draw a line between Islam and Muslim culture. At the beginning, a definition of Islamic, thereby un-Islamic, will be drawn. Then the basic criterion for any name to be considered Islamic will be argued. Finally, Bengali Muslim nomenclature will be put under examination in accordance with the conclusions drawn in previous discussions. In the end, we will conclude that there are a number of cultures being treated as “Islam” among Muslims, which can, and should, be described as “Muslim cultures” instead.

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The Contested Concept of Religious Toleration

Keywords: Freedom of religion, Religious Toleration, Liberalism, Limits on Toleration, Religion

The idea of toleration is the foundation (or a necessary feature) of the present-day liberal state. Historically, tolerance has made a strong contribution to maintaining good relations amongst the followers of diverse religious communities. When people become intolerant, both political and physical aggression can ensue. For centuries philosophers have developed the idea of toleration, analogising it to indifference, morals, respect, recognition and restraint. Thus they did not reach a consensus with regard to its meaning(s). There are number of tensions in the way that scholars understand religious toleration. The object of this article is to demonstrate that there are many different meanings given to the concept of religious toleration.

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Alexander Von Humboldt's Spiritual Exercises in Cosmos and Views of Nature

Keywords: Alexander Von Humboldt, Spiritual Exercises, Foucault, Romantic Philosophy of Nature

The aim of the paper is to analyze A. von Humboldt's Views of Nature (1808) and Cosmos (1845-1862) in the light of Foucault's researches on the tradition of the care of the self. In opposition to the reductionist interpretation of the books as a collection of natural tableaux offering scientific information in a condensed

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form, Humboldt's essays are placed within the tradition of the ethopoetic writing that builds into texts meditative frames designed to allow the reader to refashion himself into a new kind of subject. Far from representing a vague exercise in Bildung, Humboldt's texts are thus ekphraseis written down in order that the reader may imaginatively reconstruct the places described and thereby practice a spiritual exercise enabling him to have a vision of nature. Humboldt's books therefore result from the modern process whereby art takes the place of metaphysics as a means of reflecting on nature as a whole and are to be interpreted taking account of the history of the technologies of the self devised in the modern age. The ekphrastic exercises at the base of Humboldt's essays bear, in fact, a striking resemblance to the Jesuit visualization technique of the composition of place (compositio loci), with the important difference that their reader is called upon to conjure up the vision of the resacralized all-living Nature, instead of applying his imagination to episodes from the life of Christ. Thus, the German writer aims at causing the reader of his texts to reenact his visualization practices in order that he may gain a thrilling insight into nature's awe-inspiring power and plenitude of being, on which man's very life is wholly dependent. Bibliography Karl Enekel, "Meditative Frames as Reader's Guide in Neo-Latin Texts," in Karl Enekel/ Walter Melion (eds.), *Meditatio – Refashioning the Self. Theory and Practice in Late Medieval and Early Modern Intellectual Culture*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2011; Ottmar Ette, "Das Humboldtsche Schreiben," in Ottmar Ette (ed.), *Alexander von Humboldt. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, J. B. Metzler Verlag, Stuttgart-Weimar, 2018; Annette Graczyk, *Das literarische Tableau zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München, 2004; Tobias Kraft, *Figuren des Wissens bei Alexander von Humboldt. Essai, Tableau und Atlas im amerikanischen Reisewerk*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, 2014; Joachim Ritter, *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1974; Laura Dassow Walls/ Stephen Jackson/ Mark Person, "Reclaiming Consilience," in *Alexander von Humboldt, Views of Nature*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2014.

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Scepticism as a Philosophical Orientation: Ataraxia and Nirvana

Keywords: Scepticism, Epoché, Ataraxia, Emptiness, Pyrrho, Nagarjuna

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Against the prejudices of scepticism as a negative doctrine or as an epistemological challenge that must be overcome, I propose to re-dimension the conception of scepticism through the moral function - in the sense of the good living - of Pyrrhonic scepticism and Nagarjuna's Buddhist scepticism. These, from my point of view, should be understood as philosophical orientations and not as negative or pessimist doctrines or systems. Both positions are raised against their dogmatic adversaries and abstain from pronouncing themselves positively or negatively on questions of opinion or existence. Although this can often be understood as mere relativism or nihilism, they intend to posit a Middle Way. Its constructive attitude lays in the acceptance of what appears and the practice of a sceptical attitude towards ataraxia or Nirvāṇa. I take into consideration their acceptance of the phenomenal; Sextus' acceptance of costumes, laws and the god with no dogmatic compromises; the function of Epoché as a middle way; Nagarjuna's perspective of Nirvana and liberation; his acceptance of the phenomena of dependent origination; the function of Emptiness as a Middle Way.

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The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019: A Religion Based Pathway to Indian Citizenship

Keywords: India, Religion, Immigration, N.R.C., Citizenship, Secularism, Hindutva, B.J.P., Religious Persecution, Asylum, Refugees, Citizen, Religious Minorities, Hinduism, Islam

The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (Act) has India's secular values under scrutiny as the Act has created an ever-narrowing Indian pathway to citizenship. This amendment is seen as the first legal provision that begins to make India a homeland for Hindus. The Act grants Indian citizenship to persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities on the grounds of religious persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. The bill grants these specific groups to be granted citizenship if they have arrived in India before December 14, 2014. Furthermore, the C.A.A. gives an expedited path to citizenship to these groups of people who belong to the particular religion required by the C.A.A. Leaving out Muslims in this Act makes it discriminatory and puts India's secular values at risk. In Part I, this article will analyze the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, and its specific provisions. Part II and Part III will explore the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 under both International Human Rights Law and the Law of India. In Part IV, this article will explore the Citizenship Amendment Act in

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the context of Indian history and politics. Part V will explore various proposals to be considered in this situation.

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Climate Change and Religion

The issue of the presentation is; how do spiritual people look at nature? In these days of climate change, understanding nature from the perspective of spirit will potentially give us a way to be a part of the discussion of climate change. The paper is a Platonic piece, with a discussion between Plato and the two contemporary philosophers of Plato; Anaxagoras and Empedochles.

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Divinity and Decay: Curating Ephemeral Religious Objects in Museums

Keywords: Museums, Material Religion, Ephemeral Objects, Museum Curation

Although religious culture often focuses on the divine and otherworldly, material religion recognizes that this divinity is often grounded in physical objects. Vernacular religious scholars have documented increased attachment to bodily experiences in religion, with experience-based and emotionally focused forms of worship gaining popularity in many different religious traditions. With an increased focus on the physical objects, museums are left to grapple with how to display objects that are actively touched, worn, and held during religious services or practices and to curate objects that are ephemeral or short-lived. These objects include candles, incense, temporary altars, and offerings critical to understanding religious material culture but often excluded from museum curation because of their short lifespans. This paper will address two questions: (1) How do museums curate objects whose religious importance is tied to senses other than sight, such as touch and feeling? (2) How are ephemeral religious objects displayed in museum settings, and what religious traditions are often excluded from museum collections and curation because of focus on long-lasting religious objects? What is lost from exhibitions about contemporary material religion when ephemeral objects are excluded? This paper focuses on how museums can complicate religious representation by expanding the material religion that they highlight. It also grapples with how

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incorporating other senses besides sight – focused on that first question – can decrease the longevity of museum objects and can make these objects ephemeral. This paper seeks to explore the inclusion of ephemeral objects in museum curation as a way to broaden visitors’ understandings of religious material culture in the United States today. This paper is also a call to action to complicate the traditional display of religious objects, to engage visitors of all sensory needs with these objects, to incorporate more visitors’ senses into the exhibition, and to highlight more religious traditions and experiences.

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On the Challenges Facing Educational Leadership in the Arab World

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Challenges, Arab World

The global talk about educational leadership and its role in improving and developing education and achieving the desired objectives of educational institutions in light of contemporary transformations has recently increased. Hence, improving the performance of educational leaders is a necessary requirement and a response to the rapid and successive changes in the current era. However, there are challenges facing the educational leadership in the Arab world in particular, including with respect to curricula, teaching methods, educational measurement and evaluation, and others. This requires many field and theoretical studies to face the current challenges that may hinder the ability of educational leadership to achieve its objectives and purposes in leading and managing educational institutions. This study is an attempt to identify some of these challenges facing the educational leadership today in the Arab world, most notably: reformulating the objectives of the educational process, increasing the effectiveness of the role of teacher and training him, and increasing the effectiveness of curriculum development processes.

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Mystical Daejonggyo: A Transnational New Religion in Modern Sino-Korean History

Keywords: Daejonggyo, New Religious Movement, Dangun, Korean History, Colonialism

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the political landscape of the Joseon Dynasty was complicated by the involvement of external powers. The social condition of the local people was not only affected by international relations with Japan, China, and western authorities but also by the emergence of new religious movements (N.R.M.s) coming from the traditional religions of East Asia. Among them, the unique religiosity of Choe Je-u (1824–1864), Kang Jeungsan (1871-1909), Pak Chung-bin (1889-1943), and Na Cheol (1868-1916) comprise the four major native groups. Choe's Donghak was the first Korean N.R.M. and emerged in 1860. The Jeungsanist movement (1900) and Pak's Wonbulgyo (Won Buddhism) (1924) are the most successful organisations. Then, what about Na Cheol and his movement? How did Daejonggyo originate? What are their key teachings? How did they survive under colonial persecution? How can one depict the image of that native Korean N.R.M.? This paper explores the historical figure of Daejonggyo and the military-political narratives of the founder and his successors in the regions of Korea and Manchuria (China), for they were both an active religion and a political movement in religious guise. Although the Dangun myth is not especially popular in contemporary society, the transnational commitment of the group could arguably imply the philosophy of a religious nationalism through its mystical origin, counter-colonial protests, and ethnic modernity (=national enlightenment) during the 1910s-1960s.

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Ramadan Fasting, Piety and Good Personality: An Empirical Support

Keywords: Ramadan Fasting, Piety, Personality, Muslim

Fasting in Ramadan is a religious obligation practice among Muslims worldwide. Its benefits have been discussed and agreed upon by many religious scholars. One of the obvious religious benefits of fasting is the acquisition of piety or taqwa. Also, religious scholars assert fasting produces and develop personal qualities such as patience, a sense of sympathy, and less temper. However, there has not been any study on examining effects on piety and personal good quality via an empirical approach. Thus, we have conducted a study identifying these effects among Muslim undergraduates during the whole month of Ramadan. A total of 400 undergraduates took part in the study initially. But along the way, only 155 undergraduate students completed the study successfully. We divided the Ramadan fasting month into 3-

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phases consisting of 10 days each, namely, phase 1, phase 2, and phase 3. Participants completed a set of questionnaires consisting of three main parts measuring: taqwa (piety), personal good quality and quality of fasting – a daily diary sampling approach. Data were analyzed using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (H.L.M.) version 7.0. Our main findings are (1) fasting in phase 1, phase 2, and phase 3 positively predicted the positive in all 3 phases (2) fasting also positively predicted the good personal quality during advanced phases (fasting of phase 1 → good personal quality of phase 2, fasting of phase 2 → good personal quality of phase 3), but with decreasing values. (3) Piety is a significant mediator for the relationship between quality fasting and good personal quality of all three phases. This research provides empirical support for the proclaimed effects of Ramadan fasting on piety and desirable, good personal quality among Muslims.

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Management Financial Behaviour For Church During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Keywords: Safety and Blessings, Misbehaviour, Tahir Ilahi, Accounting Information System, Presentation of Financial Statements

This study aims to explore the application of the Tahir Ilahi behaviour concept, which the researchers themselves discovered in 2014, to the Covid-19 pandemic, whose end remains unknown. This study was conducted in Bali, Indonesia with 748 respondents. The analytical tool used to determine the relationship between variables is S.E.M.–P.L.S. The results showed that the variables ‘safety and blessings’ and ‘misbehaviour’ had a positive effect on Tahir Ilahi and the accounting information system. These two variables had a positive effect on the presentation of financial statements. Tahir Ilahi and the accounting information system are able to mediate the relationship between the two variables with the presentation of financial statements.

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The Concept of Poverty (faqr) in the Thought of Niyāzī Miṣrī in His Work Mawā'id al-'irfān

Keywords: Niyāzī Miṣrī Poverty (faqr) Ibn ‘Arabī

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Niyāzī Miṣrī (d. 1105/1694) is a prolific author and poet who lived in the Ottoman Empire during the seventeenth century and who left an indelible impact upon Turkish literature and Sufism. Although Niyāzī Miṣrī was a proponent of the Akbarian school (of Ibn ‘Arabī) in the first phase of his life, he did not follow the classical line of thought of his predecessors blindly; rather, he developed his own Sufi paradigm wherein his unique ideological beliefs and intellectual thoughts flourished. In addition, living in exile for eighteen years helped to shape his thoughts and widen his perspective, deepening his Sufi experiences which culminated in the composition, very shortly before his death, of his magnum opus entitled, “Mawā’id al-irfān wa ‘awā’id al-iḥsān” (The Buffet of Gnosis and the Returns of Excellence). Before explaining Niyāzī Miṣrī’s unique understanding of the concept of poverty and its relationship to other concepts, we will discuss the understandings of earlier Sufis regarding poverty in order to distinguish the degree of development and originality in Niyāzī Miṣrī’s thought. Niyāzī Miṣrī has a unique understanding of poverty, equating it with the negation of the temporary existence of all beings, their existence being understood as nothing but an illusion. We also discuss how Niyāzī Miṣrī related the concept of poverty to other Sufi concepts such as divine trust (Arabic), Unity of Being (wahdat al-wujud), and infidelity (Arabic). Niyāzī Miṣrī concludes that one must strip off one’s own existence as in reality existence only belongs to the One true Being. Once this realization is reached, only then does God appear, never to conceal Himself again: “Once poverty is completely reached, then God (appears).”

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Lāl Dās: A Doorway Between Various Communities

Keywords: Lāl Dās, Dārā Shikōh, 17th C.E.century, Vaishnava Hindus, Kabirpanthis, Sikhs, Gupti Ismailis, love for spiritual master, doorways between various communities.

The present paper focuses on Lāl Dās - a Hindu Yogi who played a pivotal role in the intellectual discussion (Su’āl va Jawāb) with the Mughal crown prince Dārā Shikōh during the 17th C.E.century. Lāl Dās seems to be Hindu from his personality; however, his thought shows that he was more than an ordinary Hindu. According to Dārā, Lāl Dās was a perfect gnostic and a walī (friend of God) who had reached a level that no other Hindu had attained. For the author of Dabistān, Lāl Dās followed a way of life very close to Hinduism. For Sherali Afsos, the author of Ārā’ish, Lāl Dās was a talented muvahhid (believer of One-ness) dervish. The consensus, therefore, seems to be that Lāl Dās was more than an ordinary Hindu.

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His teachings show that he was a Hindu bhakta – love for the spiritual master was the centerpiece of his philosophy -- while the establishment of his own māth shows that he was different from the mainstream Vaishnava Hindus and far more open-minded and inclusive than other bhaktas such as the Kabirpanthis. His thinking also diverged from that of the followers of the then Sikh gurū -- though close to the teachings, he did not commit himself to follow his contemporary Sikh gurū, but instead carved his own path. Apart from Kabirpanthis and Sikhs, there was also a third contemporary group of Guptī Ismā‘īlīs who were outward Hindus but practiced Islam secretly. As for Lāl Dās having any connection with his contemporary Guptī Ismā‘īlīs, this is hard to determine. However, the thought of Lāl Dās in Su’āl va Jawāb and his poetry resonates with the philosophy of the Ginans of the Guptī Ismā‘īlīs. Whatever was his identity, Lāl Dās was one of those doorways between various communities, who represented multiple values while retaining his own identity.

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Leading from a Transformed Heart: A Content Analysis of Biblical Pivotal Moments in the Life of the Apostle Peter

Keywords: Empowerment, Transformation, Transformed Heart, Untransformed Heart, Spiritual Formation

In this research, I examined the significance of leading from a transformed heart by exploring the spiritual formation process of the Apostle Peter. The focus of the study was on the leadership lessons that could be learned through a qualitative content analysis of 11 pivotal biblical moments purposefully selected from Peter’s life. I also examined what happened to transform the Apostle Peter by moving him from cowardice to unshakable courage as well as what mandates existed regarding the lessons learned from Peter’s spiritual formation through the lens of a heart transformation perspective. It was important to determine whether these lessons and mandates could be replicated in organizational leadership, and if so, in what manner. The purpose of the study was to bring potential insights on how to develop an obedience like Peter as faith in action. As part of the study, I shared recommendations on the why and how for shaping the heart of Christian leaders as a part of their spiritual formation journey. Through the study of the Apostle Peter, as a biblical role model and exemplar, my research contributed to scientific literature on contemporary leadership through leadership lessons and leadership principles that could be replicated in organizational leadership. An updated Petrine Empowerment Model, a Petrine Spiritual Formation Stage

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Model with nine characteristics, and the heart order from an untransformed heart towards a transformed heart in the spiritual formation process were key outcomes of this study. Each narrative of the 11 pivotal moments was summarized in an analytical memo and consolidated for a reflective overview, analysis, and discussion of results. The findings were coded and condensed into categories and themes that derived conceptual leadership lessons and leadership principles for modern-day organizational leadership. The goal of this research was to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding spiritual formation and leading from a transformed heart, to providing a Petrine Empowerment Model and an updated Petrine Spiritual Formation Stage Model based on the results of the 11 pivotal moments in Peter's life, which acts as a catalyst for developing and enriching the capacity of Christian leaders globally.

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Enacting US-China Tensions through Religious Activism in Pandemic-Election Year: Why Did Chinese American Evangelicals Support Trump?

Keywords: Chinese American evangelicalism, Donald Trump, COVID pandemic, US-China relationship

This paper examines the puzzling phenomenon that many Chinese American evangelicals support Donald Trump's re-election in 2020 through cyber activism. They did so despite Trump's racist ways of calling COVID 19 the "Chinese Virus," which brought increased instances of hate crimes against Asian Americans. Although many of these immigrant-evangelicals from mainland China identify themselves as the "Tiananmen Generation," they endorsed Trump's measures in quenching peaceful protests during the B.L.M. movement. Rejecting a few single-dimensional explanations such as geopolitical tensions and "beaconism" among Chinese liberals in idealizing American politics, I offer a multi-level institutional framework in better explaining this phenomenon of Chinese American evangelicalism by including analyses about the ideological changes, inter-group dynamics, and broader global trends. First, norms of masculinity integrated with a Christian nationalist theological view together feed into a particular outlook about reality. Traumatized lived experiences of mainland Chinese coupled with the evangelical persecution syndrome to foster a collective narcissism. Second, Chinese American evangelicalism is embedded in an organizational field of market of religious media influenced by the Christian Right in American. During the COVID pandemic, their values lean towards exaggerations, conspiracy theories, and misinformation, which accelerated during the COVID Pandemic. Lastly, they see US-China tensions

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and anti-communism in America as an unprecedented window of opportunity for regime change in China. Evangelical leaders had a heightened awareness that they were able to translate their spiritual authority to political capital, both in America and in China. Together, these multifaceted factors catalyzes Chinese American evangelicals' fervent support for Donald Trump's re-election.

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Ecumenical Christology and Interreligious Dialogue in Early Nigeria (1899-1909)

Keywords: World Christianity, Nigeria, Anglicanism, Yoruba

This paper examines Christological discourse in Nigerian Christianity. Early Nigerian Christology involved an ecclesiastical controversy concerned with the reconciliation of kingship and ecclesiastical authority during the incorporation of Nigeria into the British Empire. The Anglican Mission in Nigeria was established in the city-state of Abeokuta in the early 1840s. The Church of Nigeria evolved from two missions, the Yorùbá and Niger missions, which, by 1893, were amalgamated into the diocese of Western Equatorial Africa. The missionaries assumed that Abeokuta would become the archiepiscopal see of a united Nigerian Church. That movement was derailed as the early clergy were unsuccessful in negotiating the local religious cosmology. Authority in the indigenous kingdoms of Nigeria was based on traditions of divine kingship, animism, polytheism, and ancestor veneration. In such a complex spiritual environment, the Christian aristocracy drew on an ecumenical Christological discourse, rooted in the Christology of the early Ecumenical Councils, but adapted to the pragmatic needs of the nascent Anglican Communion in West Africa. At the turn of the 20th century, Nigerian clergymen developed an interreligious dialogue approach to negotiating local authority. This ecclesiastical discourse reached its apogee with the Rev. E.M. Lijadu's publication of the *Orunmla!* (1908), published in association with the Fifth Lambeth Conference of 1908. At Lambeth, Lijadu campaigned on the original doctrine of the Mission, that Anglican evangelism in western Africa would ultimately facilitate the development of a self-governing church and state. However, if the ethnic communities of southern Nigeria were ever to be unified in church and state, Lijadu argued that ongoing interreligious dialogue between the Nigerian clergy and the ritual priestly caste was imperative. This paper will provide an overview of Lijadu's *Orunmla!*, which articulates a Nigerian Christology based on inculturation in order to sanction a reciprocal relationship between ecclesiastical and royal authority in modern Nigeria.

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“The Man in Black: Johnny Cash and the Struggle to Save the Soul of America”

Keywords: religion, music, & public discourse, Johnny Cash, public church, public square

“The Man in Black: Johnny Cash and the Struggle to Save the Soul of America” A Study in Religion, Music, and Public Discourse By Frederick L. Downing & Jonathan W. Downing Abstract The recent years in the U.S. have been a study in Politics and Public Discourse. Historian Jon Meacham recently characterized the current American situation as a “grave moment”: “A deadly virus is ravaging us. Our jobs are evaporating. Our faith in the things that bind us is fraying for our democracy is under assault. . . .” Meacham went on to say that “Extremism, Nativism, Isolationism, and a lack of economic opportunity. . . are preventing us from realizing our nation’s promise.” So as a nation, America will have to decide what kind of country will we be—one driven by the better parts of our soul or the worst. The new President-Elect described this situation as a struggle to save the soul of America. Fifty-two years after the death of M.L.K., King’s proclamation that the arc of the moral universe inherently bends toward justice is being tested. The answer seems clear that nothing bends toward justice without someone actively shaping that arc toward justice. In his First Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln hoped that “The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature.” The better angels of our nature have at times been beckoned from unusual places and persons, as we propose from the chords of American music. In the fall of 2019, film maker, Ken Burns released a sixteen-hour documentary on American country music. As the history of a uniquely American art form, this long narration focuses on the biographies of the characters who brought it into being. One of the central figures in this American drama was Johnny Cash, who in some sense epitomized this music and tradition. His contemporary Emmylou Harris put it this way: “Take every piece of American music. . . . from blues, gospel, bluegrass, rock and roll. . . I mean, that was all in John.” For many, at a time in the 1960s -1980s, Cash was country music. And he would embody everything that this era came to be remembered for—“heedless self-destruction and a concern for social justice; an eagerness to experiment with new ideas, and a yearning for old-fashioned personal redemption”(Peter Coyote). Cash’s music explored major American themes: “prisons, railroads, Native Americans, the lowly and depressed,

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the open road, love and life and death, and damnation and salvation. And God” (Dan Rather). Cash had an explosive life and career that seemed to move from a quest for self-destruction to personal redemption. It was as if he lived “with an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other” (Rather). This paper’s thesis is that Johnny Cash is part of a long and continuing tradition of artists, creating a public square and beckoning us to come close and dialogue about life in America. Toward that end, Cash was an artist who attempted to bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice with songs like: “The Man in Black,” “Folsom Prison Blues,” “The Ballad of Ira Hayes,” “Sunday Morning Coming Down,” and the American Recordings Albums where the “Man in Black” side of Cash becomes even darker. Using the theory of Martin Marty of the public church and Walter Brueggemann on the prophetic imagination, we will show that, like Bruce Springsteen, Johnny Cash created a public church that articulated a vision with which he invited all persons to participate in a new reality. His music often critiqued the status quo but enlivened the members of his public church, which included especially the poor, prisoners, minorities, people struggling with drug addiction, and the elderly. On the one hand, he embodied a sense of American traditional values, but he was also in touch with the counter-culture, which looked to the future to see where we still needed to go. Through his work in the musical public square, Johnny Cash took his place in the historic struggle to save the soul of his country, and urged his listeners to follow the better angels of our nature.

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God Among The Nations: An Analogous Study Of Christology In The New Testament And Ela In Yoruba Tradition

Keywords: Christology, Ela, God, Nations, Tolerance, Traditions.

A Religious exclusives’ has been a problem in the religious circle worldwide. The concept of the revelation of God has been thought or claimed by some religious bodies to be the exclusiveness of their religion. This paper deals with finding God among the Nations: an analogous study of Christology in the New Testament and Ela in the Yoruba tradition. The redemptive work of Christ, that is, his person, incarnation, names, Passion Week, death, resurrection, and ascension, have their resemblance in Ela worship among the Yoruba. In Yoruba religion or mythology, the divinity called Ela has a close relationship with the New Testament Christology. This study is expected to answer such questions in the

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mind of readers as: can the superiority of Christ still be proclaimed in the pluralistic society without generating religious violence and disunity? What is the significance of Ela in Yoruba traditional religion? What are the similarities and differences between Jesus Christ and Ela? What are the implications of the concept of Ela to the Yoruba people? The research method employed is analogous. The reason is that the analogous method clearly presents each religious position. It reveals that the reality of God among the nations cannot be denied. It is clear that God has made Himself known in many ways and through many religious traditions.

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Islamic Mysticism and Cultural Translation

Keywords; Mysticism, Cultural Translation, Ideengeschichte, Modernity, Sufism

Since the beginning of “modern times,” the main mystical trend of Islam—or Sufism—has become the target of a new, multifaceted critique in the Muslim World, while at the same time, a new arena has been opened for its presence. Starting from the late eighteenth century, literary forms of Islamic mysticism began to arrive in the West, which later became a scene of a vibrant activity for Sufi-inspired teachers and tariqa members. Considered as “the major sacrifice offered by Islam on the altar of its modernization” (Itzhak Weismann), Sufism has been associated, in this new abode, with Western movements engaged in a self-critique of “modern” culture. Romanticist thinkers denouncing the principles of the Enlightenment, for instance, found mystical Islam attractive and translated Sufi prose and poetry into European languages. Sufism was also an integral part of “counter-culture” trends such as the Traditionalist School, which announced the crisis of the modern world (René Guénon) and the necessity of a revolt against it (Julius Evola). Since then, Sufism has continued to play a role in the establishment of “alternative” discourses in the modern West. Outlining the trajectory of mystical Islam in the Euro-American sphere over the last two and a half centuries, this paper argues that, in spite of such associations, the concept of “Sufi-ism” fabricated in the West through “cultural translation” incorporates several elements that are in fact in alignment with the “modern” Weltanschauung. The paper especially highlights the importance of the framework of “mystic-ism”—another category created in the modern era—as well as the expectations and

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aspirations of the Orientalists in the course of their encounter with, and conceptual construction of, Sufism.
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The Lion in the Den of the Prophets: Penelope's Art of Fortification

Keywords: Homer, Penelope, Eco-Feminism, Zhuangzi, Daoism

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Homer describes Penelope as a faithful wife who can resist temptations and consolidate her husband's household. She is usually described as a symbol of a virtuous woman, and her temperaments are like an iron fist in a velvet glove. Her wisdom lets her outsmart those indecent suitors because she has faith in Odysseus and waits for him unconditionally. However, I question this traditional view of Penelope and believe that Homer only tells men's unrealistic fantasy of a perfect wife. I attempt to discover other possibilities to interpret the reason she refuses to remarry. I adopt Susan Griffan's eco-feminist point of view to compare with Penelope's condition and treat her as a lioness who guards her den. Maybe she loves Odysseus and waits for him, but I think she mainly wants to guard her territory. Then I associate Feng Meng-Long's tale –Chopping up the Coffin to parallel Chinese men's illusion of a faithful wife with Penelope. I use Zhuangzi's philosophical view to contradict Feng's story and discuss that some people obsess with an ideal model that is inhuman and unnatural. I employ Kate Chopin's *The Story of An Hour* to demonstrate that maybe Penelope wants to enjoy her freedom when Odysseus is not around and doesn't hurry to find another husband because she doesn't hope to share her personal space anymore. If men interpret Penelope's long-term celibacy vainly, they may think that she is waiting for her missing husband meekly; nevertheless, it's possible that she is protecting her independence and rewrites the meaning of a woman's ultimate happiness.

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Inclusive Black Congregations and Black Ecclesial Queering

Keywords: Homophobia, Black Religion, Black Ecclesiology, Queer Theology, Black Theology, Sexuality

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“Inclusive Black Congregations and Black Ecclesial Queering” explores how seven mainline historically African American churches queered their ecclesial contexts despite the history of homophobia within Black Christian communities. The research seeks to provide an ethnogenic examination of their radical ecclesiologies and theologies, interrogating how and why these churches chose to practice a more radically inclusive form of Black ecclesiology. The extracted qualitative data proves these churches have successfully redefined, reimaged, re-thought, and subverted the puritanical nature, mission, and practices of Black churches and the Christian church universal. The research’s constructive component evolved from the recurring themes and queering approaches used by open and affirming Black congregations. From these insights emerged a methodology for queering Black congregations, Black ecclesial queering (B.E.Q.). B.E.Q. serves a point of departure that centers the Black Body and Black queerness as an ecclesiological strategy that intentionally subverts the heteronormative and puritan-based ideologies by transforming traditional mainline Black churches into open and affirming congregations. It is also a constructive theological tool that teaches Black churches how to create non-separatist homo social safe spaces where Black-eroticism and sexual expression are considered sinless behavior. Additionally, the research investigates the history of African American LGBTQIA+ Christians who left their homophobic Black congregations to create their own queered ecclesial spaces. These spaces are described as Affirming Black Church plants and emerging churches. Like African American churches whose Black ecclesiologies were birthed from the struggles of seeking affirmation in the era of American chattel slavery, the queered ecclesiologies of Affirming Black Church plants are also birthed from the struggle of Black queer persons. Affirming Black Church plants often possess profound and revolutionary reinterpretations of Black Christianity, Black family, and Black sexuality. Affirming Black Church plants are the original queer safe-spaces where Black LGBTQIA+ bodies have theologically affirmed their identities without shame or guilt.

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Gender Identity: Perspectives from Psychology and Religion

Keywords: gender identity; Christianity; American Psychological Association; transgender

In recent years, gender identity has become a controversial issue in America, especially in psychological research. Instead of simply using a classical, biological definition of gender, a growing trend has involved

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some people perceiving their gender differently than their anatomical gender based on their psychological perspective of themselves. Many in the scholarly community have embraced this new definition of gender identity, even transforming the meaning of transgender from someone who has had a sex-change operation to someone who simply perceives themselves as a gender different than their gender designated at birth. However, multiple religions seem to indicate a different philosophy towards gender identity much closer to the classical meaning. Judaism and Christianity describe God as the creator of all things who made people male and female from their conception instead of a fluid concept of gender. A discussion of the logical arguments from these viewpoints will support the classical religious concept of gender identity and give wisdom for how to encourage people with a transgender mentality.

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The Development of Hindu Laws in India: With Reference to The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

Keywords: Hinduism Manusmriti Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 Culture Manu Divorce Marriages Rights

Hinduism is considered to be the oldest religion in the world. Hinduism itself displays a unique culture when it comes to the divine laws sanctioned by the Hindu society. The first-ever law book Manusmriti, governs the Hindu culture. The Hindu laws have undergone a codification process, and many things are not the same as Manu prescribed. This paper would bring into light the amendments in the Hindu laws in India and how it has developed with respect to the issues concerning marriage, divorce, and women's rights. Research Objectives: The research for this paper is carried out to fulfil the following objectives and end with a conclusive study for the same: • Analyse the history of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 in India. • Critically analyse the development of the Hindu Laws in India. • Study the status of Hindu women before and after the introduction of the Hindu Code Bill & the subsequent legislation. • Compare and study the Hindu Marriage laws in India with that of Bangladesh. Methodology The present research is a doctrinal research and analytical study. Keeping this in view, the researcher utilized the conventional method of using libraries consisting of primary sources. As study is doctrinal in nature, historical and doctrinal methods are adopted because it is not possible to study purely by experimental methods. The relevant material is collected from secondary sources. Materials and information are collected by legal sources like law books, from print and electronic media. Conclusion/Findings Social evils made the ancient Hindu

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laws incompatible with the modern world. It led to a dire need of the Hindu society to adopt a codified set of rules. The indefatigable struggle of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and B.R. Ambedkar made possible the codification of the bill, which codified the Hindu laws.

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In the Name of the Father: Readings of Masculine Characterizations of God In Christian Religious Language

Keywords: Gender, Feminist Theology, Philosophy of Religion, Religious Language, Creation, Father, Matter, Mother

Challenging masculine characterizations of God in Christian religious language has been one of the crucial interests in feminist systematic theology since early feminist theologians. Michael Rea argues in his article Gender as a Divine Attribute that in Christian theology, characterizing God in predominantly masculine terms is not mandatory since gendered expressions are not divine attributes. Accordingly, he concludes to them not to be meaningful but replaceable. I agree with Rea, that gender should not be considered as a divine attribute. Nevertheless, I would not regard gendered expressions of God as meaningless and replaceable. I suggest that the meaning of masculine names of God is not to be found as divine attributes about who God is, but rather in his relation to human and creation. Janet Martin Soskice stated in her writings Trinity and Feminism and The Kindness of God that the main purpose for the writers of Biblical writings was not to emphasize God's gender but kinship, close and loving relationship between God and human. In my paper, I will argue that God's name as the Father could also refer, not only to the relation between God and human, but also to the relation between God and the creation and God and the matter. The relation between mother (lat. mater) and child is different from the relation between father and child. In the Scripture, the Father creates the universe by his Word; the Word, Logos, is the seed of the Father. There is both distance and connection. The Father has relation to his creation, especially to human beings as his image, but he has not given birth to it or them. The material world is not God's body, as panentheists have suggested, but separate and yet close to him as his good creation.

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In Quest of Jīvanmukti – A Woman’s Endeavour to Liberation

Keywords: Jīvanmukti, Women, Yogavāsīṣṭha, Yoga, Bhoga, Strīdharmā

This paper examines a fascinating narrative from a soteriological text Yogavāsīṣṭha of Vālmīki. It is a radical metaphysical text from the tenth century which democratizes the possibility of jīvanmukti (liberation while living), making it available to householders. The crux of this text is to establish that self-knowledge is the only means which can help a human bound in the ocean of saṃsāra to attain liberation. For a female, this model is different from the usual religious discourse about enlightenment, which always runs from a male to a female, where the latter acts as a passive follower of the former’s path. Further, it differs from the ideal role of a Hindu female, which confined her to her household. It makes asceticism an option not only for women who are either widows or remain unmarried but for all.

I believe an important narrative for this was about the queen Cūḍālā, who attains liberation. She also propels her husband Śikhidhvaja towards it even though he had repeatedly mocked her about her attainments and merits. However, to instruct her husband, she had to disguise herself as a male. Cūḍālā presents many paradoxes in the orthodox sense as she remains a householder, but still, her means to attain enlightenment are deeply imbued in the yogic ideas of Haṭha yoga. Moreover, she exists in a blissful meditative state but also vehemently recommends enjoyment – an alluring conflation between yoga and bhoga – renunciation and pleasure, which will be examined here. In conclusion, this paper discusses how, despite achieving liberation Cūḍālā remains bound by her devotion to her household. Is this the text’s message on strīdharmā for jīvanmukti? This research will employ the approach of textual analysis.

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Seek Ye Out of the Best Books: How Joseph Smith’s Translation Process of the Book of Mormon Suggests His Syncretic Thought Process

Keywords: Mormon, Theocracy, Mormon History, Joseph Smith, Civil Religion

A significant number of modern lay Mormons view their founder, Joseph Smith, as a consistent, systematic thinker. Accordingly, these members widely believe that all of Joseph’s significant claims and actions were guided by God. However, a growing group of modern Mormon historians has defected from the popular

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school of thought by revealing Joseph's widely dismissed, unique, eclectic thought pattern. This paper supports this growing historical dialogue by demonstrating how Joseph syncretically gathered information from his surroundings to produce the Book of Mormon. There are three major examples of material that led to his synthetic creation. First, Joseph possessed an intimate familiarity with America's civil religion. Second, he was keenly aware of Puritanism's past and evolution. Finally, he matured in the burned-over district where many utopian communities sprang to life. He wove portions of these significant aspects of his life into the Book of Mormon to justify theocracy amongst the ancient Nephites and later in his presidential campaign in 1844. Joseph used this scriptural formation rejection of the U.S. federal government, and its treatment of minorities would be solved by a theocracy he had imbued into his acolytes through his scripture. Ultimately, this paper supports the expanding view that refutes the unfortunate mistreatment of Joseph Smith's thought process, which will eventually lead to the overcoming of the notions that have proved detrimental to so many Mormons and non-Mormons alike.

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Theology and the Anthropocene: An African Investigation of Global Christianity

This paper will start with a brief discussion of the impact of 19th century colonial missions in Africa to show the extent to which the ecological crisis includes anyone who falls through the cracks of modernity. Using the social history of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe I will argue that the ecological crisis takes us beyond matters of race, class, and gender to a world of human experiences Eco suffering that can be used to further our understanding of the urgent need to make Anthropocene the setting for the development of new ways of doing theology today. In short, I am proposing the outline of a new boom based on research African Church History done for my M.Litt. thesis (Aberdeen, 1989) and the writing of my Oxford doctoral thesis in which stories of the journey of the universe in creation in Shona God-Talk transcends gender by highlighting the greater mystery of life on earth. It feels good to join the celebration of the first 100 years of women graduate from Oxford by sharing my findings with the Oxford Symposium on Religious Studies.

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