**ABSTRACTS UMWAAR** April 2024 in order of presentation.

**4:00-5:15 Friday**

**Panel #1: Roundtable for the Interreligious Studies Unit**

**Meredith 238**

“Subverting and Expanding Philosophy of Religion”

Tim Knepper, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa

Jed Forman, Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa

Gereon Kopf, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa

Moderator: Cody Dolinsek, Drake University, Des Moines, IA

The methods and definitions employed by philosophers of religion are typically framed within the context of anglophone academia and assume Christian theology as the prototype of any philosophical inquiry into religion even as some of these concepts were suggested by early Islamic philosophers. Even recent attempts to be inclusive employ Anglocentric definitions of “philosophy” and “religion” and apply conceptual frameworks developed within Christian theology.

In the past ten years, a group of scholars created two new program units at the American Academy of Religion to explore pioneering models of global critical philosophy. We propose a roundtable to introduce three innovative approaches that explore the challenges of a truly global philosophy of religion, analyze the power structures of as well as decenter the discourse, and make our discipline truly inclusive.

Timothy Knepper (Drake University) will introduce his global critical approach of philosophy of religion that applies his journey paradigm to traditions of philosophy of religions from five distinct geographical regions as well as current contemporary academic philosophy with the goal of creating new structures of critical reflection on the notion and language of “religion.”

Jed Forman (Simpson College) argues that apophaticism suggests that we can only approximate God’s qualities through negative theology. In contrast, Buddhist phenomenology engages in a detailed debate on Buddha’s experience of the world. Forman draws on a debate between two Tibetan Buddhist exegetes, Tsongkhapa and Taktsang Lotsawa, to propose “theophenomenology” as a global philosophy of religion.

Gereon Kopf’s (Luther College) “multi-entry approach” radically decenters the discourse on philosophy of religion. This approach invites a multiplicity of participants to introduce 1) their fundamental paradigms as well as 2) their definitions of “philosophy” and “religion,” 3) to engage other systems on their own terms, and 4) to locate themselves and their multilogue partners on the landscape of philosophical approaches.

**Panel #2 Religion, Gender, and Sexuality Unit**

**Meredith 235**

#1

"All Are Welcome"? Queer Identity in the Christian Sacrament of Holy Communion”

Kristina Hill

Luther Seminary

St. Paul, Minnesota

Amid societal and ecclesial discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people, Christian communities have the opportunity to welcome and affirm people of different sexual orientations and gender identities. Historically, most LGBTQIA+ Christians have had to stifle, hide, or repent of queer identity in order to participate in the church’s sacramental life. Queer theologies challenge and subvert these heteronormative ecclesial narratives and examine the sacraments from an LGBTQIA+ perspective. In many queer theologies of Holy Communion, identity emerges as a major, controversial theme. In this paper, I analyze two models of the role of queer identity in Holy Communion: the “identity affirmation model” of Mary Elise Lowe and the “identity minimization model” of Elizabeth Stuart. Utilizing my own queer theological commitments, I propose that a new theology of queer Holy Communion must balance the particularity of the individual with the universal inclusion promised by the sacrament. To this end, I employ the postcolonial concept of strategic essentialism, which balances queer theory’s aim of identity deconstruction with the need for marginalized queer individuals to experience life-giving redemption and belonging at the communion table.

#2

“A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Anthropology: Biblical Recourse in Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching”

Evan Marsolek

Loyola University

Chicago, Illinois

This paper interrogates the rhetorical forms deployed in recent Catholic Social Teaching concerning the matter of “gender theory” and forms of anthropology that do not resonate with an anthropology of biological complementarity ordered toward biological reproduction. The comical lashing out of the Church in relation to gender and sex proves to be deadly serious, as philosophical processes that rationalize the non-humanity of non-normative sex and gender occur. Furthermore, the categorization of sex and gender occurs alongside the unutterable construction of race. Despite its denominational particularity, the universal aim of CST demands scrutiny from those outside the tradition. This paper will utilize trans theory to reveal the opaque constructedness of the Church’s anthropology, arguing it is—despite its own assertions—only one anthropology among many, and assumes a participatory role in the so-called ideology of gender theory it is seeking to thwart.

A single biblical passage enlivens the rhetoric of “Male and Female He Created Them”: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education (2019): Genesis 1:27. Close readings of Male and Female, as well as intertextual conversations with other Catholic Social Teaching (“Che cosa è l’uomo? (Sal 8,5): Un itinerario di antropologia biblica, Humanae Vitae, the Pastoral Letter, and Laudato Si’) shape this study. In particular, how Genesis 1:27 is treated within Che cosa; how Humanae Vitae and the Pastoral Letter complicates the sexual subject through trans and decolonial analysis; and finally, how the rationalization of the non-humanity of intersex and transgender people toward the goal of “integral anthropology,” reverberates back to Laudauto Si’s call for “integral ecology.” This paper asserts the Church’s anthropology does not so much reconsider its own position, but retrenches its sexist, transmisic, racist, and colonial logics in a new way.

**8:15-9:30 am Saturday**

**Panel #3: Ethics Unit**

**Meredith 238**

#1

“Utilizing Narrative Patterns to Support Student Learning in Introductory Scripture Courses”

Karl Kuhn

Lakeland University

Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Introductory courses to the Christian Scriptures help students appreciate the dynamic and variable factors shaping the development of these works and the diversity of traditions they contain. These courses unveil for students the reality of multiple sources, spliced and redacted traditions, theological tensions and even discordance. In doing so, these courses invite students who come equipped with a harmonizing hermeneutic to re-examine the unity they assume within and between the Christian scriptures.

Though home to disparate and dialectical traditions, the biblical writings enfold those traditions within narrative frameworks that contextualize them as parts of a larger whole. Accordingly, introductory scripture courses also have the potential to help students discern unifying themes and patterns of coherence that the canonical form of the biblical writings themselves encourage. By drawing on these narrative patterns, instructors can map out for students, or help them discover for themselves, the broader contours of the biblical traditions’ testimony to God, and God’s intentions for Israel and all of humanity. This technique can be pedagogically effective for students of varying degrees of familiarity with and beliefs about the biblical writings.

This presentation will overview several of the harmonizing tendencies that the biblical traditions themselves display. Then, it will discuss in some detail a narrative pattern, initiated in the Golden Calf Affair (Exodus 32-34) and replicated throughout the Old Testament, characterizing God's challenging relationship with God's people. Finally, the presentation will offer some examples of how this and other narrative patterns could be used to enrich student learning in introductory Scripture courses.

#2

“A Liberating Theology of Reproductive Justice”

Thia Cooper

Gustavus Adolphus College

St. Peter, Minnesota

Christian theologies around reproduction tend to focus on abortion, which is an important issue. However, there is far more to reproduction than abortion; reproduction includes preventing, ending, and achieving pregnancy, achieving birth, and having and raising children. These areas include contraception, sterilization, surrogacy, fetal selection, infertility treatment, miscarriage, infant death, foster care, childcare, and so forth. This paper aims to introduce a holistic theology of reproduction that begins with the current unequal and unjust practices and moves toward reproductive justice. I begin from the perspective of liberation theologies, which argue that Christianity should free people rather than oppress them. To have reproductive justice, each person must be able to not have or have and raise a child in a safe and healthy environment.

At its core, this is a theology of everyday life. Every aspect of our lives is affected by reproduction, and reproduction is affected by every aspect of life.

Second, this theology requires a focus on community, rather than on individual action. One cannot reproduce alone, and one cannot raise a child alone. God created humans to be in communion with each other and God.

Third, this theology argues that the body is a sacred site. Through our bodies, we have a relationship with others and with God. This includes reproducing and not reproducing.

Fourth, this theology reconsiders a notion of sin. Christianity has often considered any prevention of conception or ending of pregnancy to be sinful. Instead, I want to consider sin as anything that prevents us from having just relationships with each other and God and re-examine reproduction through that lens.

Finally, this theology aims to work against the damaging structures of inequality. We need to ensure the structures support rather than harm human beings.

**Panel #4 Historical Perspectives on Religion and Philosophy Units**

**Meredith 235**

#1:

"Demolition of Churches Notwithstanding: Christianity’s Boom in Twenty-First Century China"

Elena Vishnevskaya

Central College, Pella, Iowa

The spellbinding surge of Christianity in China has baffled the Western scholarly community for several decades as Christianity has been growing by leaps and bounds despite the restrictive religious policy of the Chinese Communist Party. In an effort to keep tabs on both registered and unregistered churches, the CCP has employed facial recognition software, telephone tracking, and surveillance cameras. The authorities have utilized both physical and psychological harassment to intimidate Christians into recanting their beliefs. Churches have been demolished and church properties, along with personal assets of Christians, confiscated. And yet, all of these draconian measures notwithstanding, Christianity in China shows no signs of slowing down. This paper will examine the contextual factors which have shaped the runaway expansion of Chinese Christianity—spiritual, political, economic, and socio-cultural. The collapse of the Mao era totalitarianism, the Chinese state’s ongoing antagonism toward religion, rapid urbanization, extraordinary economic development, and marked social inequality will be discussed as providing a pivotal framework for Christianity’s boom in China.

#2

“Civil Religion & Religious Nationalism as Ideal Types”

Ryan T. O’Leary

University of Wisconsin-Steven’s Point

Steven’s Point, Wisconsin

One of the core principles of the study of American civil religion is that it is important to attend to the stories we tell, especially those that inform our national self-understanding and legitimate our form of government. In the 21st century, this means understanding the fluid and subtle distinctions between American civil religion and American religious nationalism. This is especially important because these terms are slippery and not used consistently in the literature on religious nationalism and civil religion. For example, in American Covenant, Philip Gorski distinguished civil religion, religious nationalism, and radical secularism. He called religious nationalism the dark side of civil religion: “Add in a little blood rhetoric, and civil religion can devolve into religious nationalism.” Meanwhile, in their reference handbook, Religious Nationalism, Atalia Omer and Jason A. Springs treated civil religion as a form or subset of religious nationalism: “Understood in this way, civil religion is not a phenomenon categorically distinct from nationalism,” they explained. “If we think of it as distinguishable at all, it is as a version or type of nationalism.” So, which is it? Is American religious nationalism a corruption and devolution of American civil religion? Or is American civil religion simply the American version of a broader social phenomenon called religious nationalism? Or are these distinctions valuable at all? This paper will begin to answer those questions by clearly defining American civil religion, American religious nationalism, and American Christian nationalism as ideal types, conceptual abstractions that can help the student of society to get a handle on the chaotic and infinite flux of social reality. In today’s political world, that work includes understanding civil religion and religious nationalism.

#3

“Weeping for Dido: Augustine's Divorce and His Account of Philosophy and Theology”

Jennifer Hockenbery

St. Norbert College

De Pere, Wisconsin

The proposed presentation, using curated images alongside quotes from Confessions, demonstrates Augustine’s love affair and divorce as key parts of his religious and philosophical journey. The tragic love story marks Augustine’s philosophical and theological moves as intertwined with his own lived experience. Foregrounded is his path from academic skepticism and Roman morality towards an ethic of love, an epistemology of hope, and a doctrine of grace.

The story starts with the way Augustine weaves his description of falling in love with his concubine with the awakening of his desire for truth. In the middle of the Confessions, Augustine narrates how his Academic crisis in which he doubts the possibility of knowing Truth relates to his ethical crisis in which he doubts the possibility of finding true Goodness. Adopting Roman mores, nodding to a skeptic’s ethics, in both his professional and his familial life, Augustine seeks professional promotion and divorces his concubine. The result is a guilty pathological melancholia, which culminates in his weeping in a garden for salvation. The scene of healing, when Augustine reads Romans 13 and experiences the imputation of grace, offers a lived experiential account of what William James names as the healing of the sick soul and marks the conversion of Augustine to faith in God’s imputing grace allowing him to embrace an epistemology of hope and with it an ethic of love rather than Academic skepticism.

Having heard the story through this lens, the audience will consider the following conclusions: Augustine’s love affair was a crucial event in his life; his divorce was a crucial period of pathological melancholy that he recounts to show the moral and epistemological danger of academic skepticism. Also noteworthy, careful attention to the text, shows Augustine as an advocate for love, marriage, and women in ways that are too often ignored or misunderstood.

**Panel #5: Student Panel**

**Meredith 234**

#1

“Ezekiel 40-48: A Vision of Heaven”

Will Flug

Central College, Pella, Iowa

Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple in chapters 40-48 is difficult to understand. Because of this, there are varying interpretations of this section of scripture. This paper will address the historical-critical, Jewish, and Christian accounts of these chapters. First, context will be discussed. It is important to understand, as best we can, the time, place, and author of Ezekiel 40-48. After considering the context of these chapters, the historical-critical account will be examined. The relation of Ezekiel’s depiction of the temple will be compared with both Solomon’s temple and Ezra’s temple. Although these comparisons may present a good argument, either that Ezekiel is revisioning Solomon’s temple or is a description from roughly the same time period of Ezra’s temple, the evidence for these comparisons is undermined at several points. Next, the meaning of the temple in Christian theology will be explained. Several New Testament passages will be cited in this section, including John 2, 1 Timothy 2, and 1 Corinthians 6. Following this, the Jewish perspective will be examined. The Talmud and biblical commentator C.F. Keil (although a Christian but he summarizes the Jewish account) show that the Jewish perspective has a physical temple in mind, with connections to the coming of the Messiah. Finally, two distinguishable Christian perspectives will be examined. The first is that the temple is representative, that is, symbolic of the Christian church and is not understood as a physical building. While this perspective seems to have a strong basis, it is undermined by aspects of Ezekiel’s depiction, for example, the specific measurements that are included in these chapters. The second Christian perspective that will be explored understands the temple as a physical place that will be constructed by Jesus Christ upon His return. In my examination of the textual evidence, this second perspective is the most solid, as it contains explanations for the animal sacrifice that are present in these chapters, as well as striking similarities to the book of Revelation. It is through this view that Christians should find meaning in Ezekiel 40-48, and it is the account closest to the Jewish account except that the Messiah for Jews has not come yet.

#2

“Police and Politics, With A God In Between Them”

Catalina Samaniego

Drake University

Des Moines, Iowa

This paper delves into the complex intersection of policing, religion, and violence in South Africa, aiming to shed light on the multifaceted factors contributing to the perceived brutality within the South African Police Service (SAPS). The study begins by examining the historical context, tracing the roots of police violence to the legacy of apartheid, and explores its persistence in the post-apartheid era. Utilizing various sources, the paper highlights instances of police brutality, including the Marikana protest in 2012 and the tragic case of Nathaniel Julies in 2020. The paper discusses the demographic changes in the South African Police Service (SAPS) post-apartheid, emphasizing the shift from a predominantly white force to a predominantly Black one. Despite increased racial diversity, the study argues that police violence persists, challenging the notion that racial equity alone improves policing. The paper also explores the correlation between religious affiliation, particularly Christianity, and policing, challenging the prevailing idea that police violence is solely linked to racial factors. Additionally, it examines the integration of indigenous practices and Christianity in the SAPS, asserting that this combination does not inherently lead to violent policing. The study calls for a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics within the SAPS and advocates for global scrutiny and accountability for law enforcement agencies.

#3

“The Medicine of Traditional Lacrosse:

Ojibwe Religion, Holistic Wellbeing, and Transcendent Sport”

Lachen Reid

Gustavus Adolphus College

St. Peter, Minnesota

This article relates Fond du Lac reservation’s revitalization of the Ojibwe game baaga’adowewin to the larger field of religious study through offering a functional definition of Indigenous religion. Through depicting the game’s positive impact on holistic wellbeing and interviewing Fond du Lac community leaders, this article presents the game as transcending its

physical performance. Due to its transcendent nature, its role in community education and cohesion are argued to be traits of an Ojibwe religious practice. In order to construct a functional definition of Indigenous religion which turns into an analytical tool to contextualize Ojibwe knowledge, this article relies on two scholarly precedents. One in the field of religious study, especially pulling from Vine Deloria Jr.’s God is Red and the Ojibwe Medicine Wheel, to establish a functional definition of indigenous religion. And two, a paradigm of successful efforts to revitalize Indigenous practices, inspired by Dr. Joseph Gone’s work with reliance on Indigenous knowledge in response to modern community health problems. At Fond du Lac, the religious components and playing of baaga’adowewin has become a mechanism to inspire communal interdependence and improve holistic wellbeing. The massively beneficial effect of the game on the community functions as a demonstration for how scholarly depictions of Indigenous religion genuinely manifest in the real world. While this case study additionally supports the scholarly paradigm of revitalization, it most prominently offers a new perspective into the field of religion. This challenge to Western notions of what constitutes religion culminates in a comparison of Indigenous voices on the subject with a real world case study, demonstrating the practical utility of a more nuanced and diverse conceptualization of religion and religious study.

**AAR Plenary Address**

**Prof. Douglas Kries**

“Religions and Their Communities: Is Philosophy Friend or Foe”

Gonzaga University

Spokane, Washington

**Meredith 101**

Both philosophy and religion make claims about the highest things, including the highest things most important for political life. Beginning with some selected passages from Plato and Augustine, this presentation will first outline the predominant position on the relationship between religion, politics, and philosophy as it was understood within “ancient” philosophy. The second task of the talk will be to consider some of the main lines of “modern” philosophy’s view of the relationship between the three, treating especially Francis Bacon and Immanuel Kant, as well as the “historicists.” The talk will treat the questions involved especially from the point of view of philosophy, asking in particular whether philosophy must understand itself principally as a “foe” or a “friend” of religion and the communities religion gives rise to.

**1:00-2:15 Saturday afternoon**

**Panel #6:** Asian Studies and Buddhist Studies Units

**Meredith 238**

#1

“Is there a "traditionalist" engaged Buddhism?”

Donna Lynn Brown

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Much scholarship has been done on "engaged Buddhism." This scholarship characterizes Buddhist social engagement as done by “modernist” Buddhists as a way to help others through activities that promote peace and social justice, involving activism as well as material aid. Drawing on Orientalist stereotypes, it paints a picture of “traditional” Buddhists as socially disengaged hermits or monks, whose only way of helping others is through faith-based means like ritual, prayer, and reliance on sacred objects; in this picture, modernist Buddhists abandon these old-fashioned methods and the cosmology behind them, and replace them with modern, scientific worldviews and up-to-date, material and political ways of helping others. As a result of this picture and its assumptions, scholarship on Buddhist social engagement virtually never examines today’s traditionalist Buddhists—taking for granted that they are socially disengaged. This paper, based on research on the traditionalist transnational Buddhist organization “Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition” (FPMT) contradicts this picture. Since its inception in the early 1970s, FPMT has been preserving, practicing, and transmitting its Geluk lineage, and has also been engaging socially. It operates freestanding social projects in India, Nepal, and Mongolia as well as in Western countries, and its Dharma centres run a range of socially-oriented activities to benefit their communities in material ways. In addition to establishing that a traditionalist Buddhist group can be socially engaged, the research goes further to ask whether this social engagement is the same as what modernist Buddhists do or has “traditionalist” features. It finds certain features that FPMT’s engagement does not share with modernists and that draw on FPMT’s traditional worldview and beliefs. Based on the case study of FPMT, a “traditionalist” form of Buddhist social engagement is posited and its features discussed.

#2

“The Phenomenon of Church Closing in Indonesia: The GKI Yasmin Case and Its Implications for Interreligious Relations”

Hans A. Harmakaputra

Augustana University

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

The fall of President Suharto from his long authoritarian regime in 1998 marks the beginning of the Reformation period that ushers in the “conservative turn” among Indonesian Islam in politics, social, economic, and cultural realms. One of the most visible manifestations of it is the significant increase in church closing cases. Church closings refer to various phenomena that include a variety of activities, from individuals’ objections and demonstrations to physical attacks. Studies show that other factors have contributed to the rise in numbers, such as the state’s policy, Christian missionary activities, and the fear of Christianization. Arguably, although these cases were located in Muslim-majority regions, especially in Java and Sumatra, their impacts reached other areas in Indonesia that contribute to the generally negative perception of Muslims. The paper focuses on one case that has gained national and international attention: the Gereja Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church) at Taman Yasmin case. In April 2023, after more than a decade of struggle, the church was opened at a different location. The GKI Yasmin case was unique because it involved the legal and state apparatus in addition to the local population’s objection, which prolonged the resolution process. The paper analyzes several strategies employed by the congregation ranging from public rituals as a form of resistance to cooperation with Muslim stakeholders and local government apparatus. Utilizing data from written materials and oral narratives conducted through interviews with key figures during field research, the research aims to offer a more balanced and fuller picture of Christian-Muslim relations after the conservative turn in contemporary Indonesia. Christians are far from passive and submissive. Instead, they cultivate different modes of subsisting that allow them to negotiate their identity and roles in the larger society.

#3

“Devotional Matter: Objects in Memory and Imagination within Hindu Practice”

Iva Patel, Augsburg University

Minneapolis, Minnesota

## **Panel #7: Student Panel**

**Meredith 234**

#1

“The Luminary of the Rhein: Hildegard of Bingen’s Unapologetic Insistence on the Female Experience of God”

Anna R. Venenga

Central College, Pella, Iowa

When thinking about the history of spirituality in the Christian tradition, the important figures we first consider often happen to be the male heroes of the Christian faith. Of course, we cannot say that male figures are unimportant or that their contributions should not be studied, but we only get one perspective if we only consider the male lens. To privilege the male voice is to neglect the fullness of Christian spirituality which bespeaks rich feminine experience of the divine. Many remarkable women have had a lasting impact on the Christian tradition by offering a unique lens through which to view the relationship between God and the world. One woman who achieved great things in the Church and thus looms large in the history of Christian spirituality, is Hildegard of Bingen, a German nun (and later an abbess), visionary, prophetess, writer, preacher, artist, herbalist, and posthumously Doctor of the Church. Her many titles show that she gracefully yet boldly defied the norms of her time which confined most of her female contemporaries to a limited number of roles in society and the church. By engaging with an authoritative female voice in Christian spirituality, the author of this paper hopes to bring attention to the distinctive nature of a female religious experience. Hildegard’s illuminations and writing will be used to showcase the German mystic’s understanding of God and the divine-human relationship as undergirded by feminine images.

#2

“Embracing Pluralism: The Biblical Responsibility of Interfaith Work in Inspiring Social Justice and Peace”

Gabrielle Janssen

Luther College

Decorah, Iowa

When exclusivist faith traditions emphasize and absolutize exoteric forms of religion, conflict and social division manifest and persist. Looking to John Hick’s theory of religious pluralism, different faith traditions are reminded that their fallible and socially constructed religions see only in part. Pluralism involves the notion of mystery and ineffability to emphasize that there is no one right way of interpreting the sacred More, as each tradition experiences and responds in its own unique way. Pluralism dismantles power dynamics and opens up the possibility of a diversity of truths. The Bible is an example of how one religious tradition interprets and communicates experiences of the More. However, exclusive interpretations deprive the richness of the Bible’s pluralistic, polyvocal, and contradictory texts, as conventional wisdom restricts faith language with straightforward interpretations of symbols. Adopting a pluralistic framework and acknowledging the diversity within the Bible can inspire a posture of open receptivity within exclusivist interpretations. Biblical scholar Peter Enns suggests that contemporary Christians should adopt the biblical tradition of reinterpreting sacred experiences and texts for their own time and place, cultivating the Bible’s history of, and trajectory towards, social justice. A critical reading of the Bible allows one to understand interfaith work as part of the biblical trajectory towards a more peaceful and equitable world. Interfaith work builds bridges across socio-religious divides, dismantles power dynamics, and adopts a posture of love and humility. It offers healing to the conflicts and injustices caused by religious polarization and absolutism. This paper argues that interfaith work, supported by pluralistic frameworks, offers the ability to use the Bible in a socially responsible way by using wisdom and love to combat hatred, foster understanding, reduce oppression, and inspire the celebration of religious diversity.

#3

“Do I Wake or Sleep?” — Queer Spiritual Care and Remembrance During the AIDS Crisis

Marshall Laidlaw

Luther College

Decorah, Iowa

During the 1980s and 90s, queer people experienced a time of ravenous sickness, death, and grief due to HIV/AIDS. Queer people lived with AIDS at the same time the disease killed them, each breath burdened under government and church structures that deemed their lives “ungrievable.” How did this “ungrievable” community continue to grieve, die, and care for each other? Living under this reality, some queer people volunteered at hospitals or AIDS healthcare organizations, many joined activist circles like ACT UP, and others still found hope and care in religious communities. With immense suffering and palpable questions of death reaping the air, how did dimensions of spirituality and spiritual care intersect with queer communities in New York City, San Francisco, and the Midwest? Analyzing often-untold tales of spiritual care from these harrowing hours with a queer studies approach to death reveals a queer spirituality of “eschatological living” under the shadow of death that challenged normative notions of dying and mourning. Stories from St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York City, Maitri Hospice in San Francisco, Father Louie Blenkner’s AIDS foster home in Minneapolis, and more showcase positive interactions between AIDS patients and religious organizations, both Christian and Buddhist, not commonly included in AIDS narratives. Religious queer people with AIDS found or created spaces where they could care and be cared for that valued the intersection of their faith and sexual identity. Spiritual care for these lives continues into the present through remembrance of the AIDS dead. As the world faces widespread death due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the lives of queer people with AIDS offer “plague wisdom” for us who go on living in a post-COVID reality. Remembering these stories can also unify queer and transgender communities today who once again face waves of oppressive legislation.

## **Interfaith Plenary Address**

**2:30-3:25 pm**

## **Sarah McCammon**

## National Political Correspondent for NPR

## “Making Sense of Religious Pluralism As an E(x)vangelical”

**3:45-5:00**

## **Panel #8: Biblical Studies**

## **Meredith 238**

#1

“A ‘Theology of Work’: Paul, James, Genesis, and 1 Clement”

Paul A. Hartog

Faith Baptist Theological Seminary

Ankeny, Iowa

In recent decades, several academic articles have attempted to use the fibers of 1 Clement (c. 96 C.E.) to patch the interpretive tension between “justification by faith” in Paul’s letters and “justification by works” in the Epistle of James. This paper will review recent scholarship but will then turn toward an overlooked consideration, by arguing that 1 Clement’s understanding of faith and works (although usually filtered through the prism of moral works within a soteriological framework) can actually inform a “theology of work” in the sense of productive labor. In his defense of “good works,” Clement does not reach for the Pauline shelf, grabbing the doctrine of union with Christ (cf. Rom. 6); nor does he target a “dead faith” devoid of works (cf. James 2). Instead, Clement appeals to the opening narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures, urging the imitation of the divine pattern of “good works” reflected in creation (1 Clem. 33). Humans made in the imago Dei have the privilege of following the example of their Creator and Master, who himself accomplished creative and productive “good works” that brought him praise. By grounding his moral exhortation in divine creation, Clement fashions a theological framework of “works” that can embrace creative endeavors of productive labor as well as the virtuous acts of Christian conduct. Although this theological import has been overlooked by interpreters tethered to soteriological questions arising from a “Paul vs. James” paradigm, Clement’s moral reasoning informs not only “good (moral) works” but also a “theology of work (productive labor).”

#2

“The Meaning of Desire (תשוקה): An Integrative Approach to Genesis 3:16; 4:7; and the Song of Songs 7:10[11]”

Timothy Little

Faith Baptist Theological Seminary

Ankeny, Iowa

The Hebrew Scriptures depict a change in relationship between man and woman after humanity sinned in the Garden of Eden. The nature and implications of this change hinge on the interpretation of Gen 3:16 and, specifically, the meaning of תשוקה—the “desire” as found in the divine curse on Eve (as wife). Definitions like “inclination,” “turn/return,” “movement toward,” “basic instinct,” or “preoccupation, devotion” fail to nuance the nature and motion of the concept in context. Other definitions of this word have inadequately harmonized its three uses in Gen 3:16; 4:7; and Song 7:10[11]. On the one hand, proponents of the “sexual desire” interpretation emphasize the connection to the Song of Songs 7:10[11] but discard or marginalize Gen 4:7. On the other hand, proponents of the “power or control” view emphasize the connection to Gen 4:7 but jettison or dismiss the Song 7:10[11]. This paper, however, will seek to integrate all three uses of תשוקה by interpreting Song of Songs as echoing Genesis, thus enabling the three uses to be interpreted in concert, suggesting a common meaning or connotation within their literary contexts and socio-cultural perspectives.

#3

“Targum Onqelos on Gen.5: The ‘Image’ in Adam, the Ages of the Sethites, and Enoch’s Mortality”

Terence J. Kleven

Central College, Pella, Iowa

Genesis 5 is the account of the Sethite genealogy. According to the depiction of the Masoretic Text (MT), the Sethites are a replacement for the Cainite line. The genealogy follows immediately after the account of the violence of Lamech, the descendant of Cain, who continues Cain’s example of dealing with others with violence. Gen. 5 begins with the explanation of the birth of another son of Adam and Eve, the son, Seth, and the chapter makes no further mention of the descendants of Cain. Gen. 5:1-3 imitate the phrases of Gen. 1:26-27 that Adam and Seth are “made in the image of God” and “male and female created he them,” and with these phrases give a sense of a new beginning, no doubt to reinforce the conclusion that the line of Cain is a dead end. Since there is no corporeal depiction of the Deity either in Gen. 1:26-27 nor here in Gen. 5:1-3, the teaching appears to be that the ‘image’ is spiritual and intellectual rather than physical. We cannot be certain, however, whether this image is actual or only potential. Will education in the rational arts be necessary for the image to be realized? Seth is said to resemble Adam (vs. 3), and perhaps this resemblance is in the deepest sense of the meaning of ‘father’ and ‘son’ as entailing the learning of a faculty of rational judgment (see the usage of ‘sons’ in II Kings 2:3, 5, and 7). If so, the Sethite line begins with considerable hope of an alternate way to Cain’s way of violence, the way of education rather than violent intimidation. The rest of the chapter is the presentation of the descendants of Seth from Seth to Noah, along with their great ages which perhaps indicate that this spiritual or intellectual image leads to long life. Later in the chapter, we learn that one of the descendants of Seth, Enoch, is the zenith of this line of aged ancestors because he “walked with God: and he was not; because God took him” (vs. 22, MT). Moreover, his son, Methuselah, is a second zenith who is the longest living of this line, living nine-hundred and sixty-nine years. Yet, what does the MT mean exactly? Does this line of Seth lead to Enoch’s assumption to heaven and, thus, the overcoming of mortality? Targum Onqelos’s Aramaic translation (TO) is aware of these *aporiae* in this chapter, and, as we can see in the judgments he makes in translating, he provides his commentary often with light but deliberate phrasing. In vs. 3, instead of reusing the term *ṣelem* as in the MT, TO uses variations on *demah* twice in a phrase, “he [Adam] begat him [Seth] in his resemblance who was a resemblance of him [Adam],” the repetition suggesting that Seth did not simply obtain a natural capacity, a *ṣelem*, through natural inheritance but he obtained the actualization of the faculty of judgment through learning the rational arts. Furthermore, although the Sethites are old, TO insists that they do not escape the curse of death, even its exemplary representative, Enoch. TO thus commits himself to a certain reading of the MT. Enoch’s righteousness is noteworthy, as TO translates with the phrase “he walks in the fear of the Lord” (vss. 22 and 24), but TO also says “because [God] causes him to die” (ארי אמיתיה יוי ,vs. 24). In TO’s translation, Enoch does not escape death and is not transfigured into a divine, corporeal being or an angel, like Elijah of a later time. TO affirms both Enoch’s exemplary righteousness and his immortality, but he does not promote a glorification of Enoch into a semi-divine creature as was done by later Enochic traditions. Rather, TO establishes what would become the Rabbinic reading of the MT of Gen. 5:24. Exemplary righteousness, the product of the actualization of the ‘image’ of good judgment, is possible and necessary for mankind, but it will not result in corporeal assumption or transfiguration. Thus, TO presents a mortal Enoch and it steers clear of the mystical and apocalyptic versions of Enoch which extol Enoch’s transfiguration. TO represents mainstream Jewish teaching and is deliberately rejecting the apocalypticism of Enochic spirituality.

**Panel #9: Religion, Theology, and the Arts Unit**

## **Meredith 235**

#1

“The Garden- A Refuge: Theatre, Religion, and Eco-Consciousness”

Cia Sautter

St. Kate, St. Scholastica, and the Artistic Director at Storydance Theatre

St. Paul, Minnesota

What if theatre is understood as intersubjective embodiment of highest values? Embodied stories not only display our understanding of the world, they also help us understand the reality of our mindset and aspirations, whether a set of ethics or a specific theology. How theatre is presented also makes us think about our vision of the world as a performer or spectator. Some questions to ask for investigating this premise include: • Why and does the sacred-secular split cause a disconnect in creating eco-consciousness? How did this change the content and method of presenting theatre? • why might theological models prove helpful for even “secular” theatre scholars? • What techniques from performance studies might facilitate study between religious and theatre criticism? Critical theories on the environment in both the study Religion and Theatre often place emphasis on recognizing a holistic relational view between self, community, and creation, and that this is crucial for continued existence. Theatrical performance may be key to normalizing enacted eco-consciousness, through presentations that embrace systems of relationship that include humans and nature as part of a whole. While ritual within community might supply a sufficient embodiment of eco-conscious values, theatrical storytelling allows for broader public participation and dialog on enacting sacred values. Therefore, the thesis of this paper is: Theatre may serve as an effective means for developing human recognition of the more-than-human-word, as performance heightens awareness of our relationships to addresses issues of social and environmental justice. Critical theory shared include historical and theological insights from Tili Boone Cuillé, David Seidenberg and Nathan Lyons, along with views of theatre scholars Richard Schechner, Lisa Woynarski and Julia Lupton. Application is made through examination of a play based on the biblical book of Job entitled The Garden.

#2

“Ekphrasis/Ekstasis: the Art Subject in Julian's Revelation”

Max Yeshaye Brumberg-Kraus

St. Paul, Minnesota

This paper posits an interpretation of Julian's Revelations of Divine Love as a form of ekphrastic writing. Without denying the significant theological and spiritual core of the 14th century mystic's oeuvre, this paper draws special attention to the literal crucifix that animated in Julian's hands as she lay sick in bed, spurring both her visions and the years of contemplative writing that followed. Someone made the crucifix, carved and/or sculpted its elements, creating not only a tool for worship but a sacred art object. This art object--or art subject--not only animated before Julian but animated Julian: to see, to think, to love, to and to devote her life's work toward understanding all that the cross showed her. This paper puts Julian in conversation with two other female, Anglophone authors on art and vision, poet H.D. and novelist Jeanette Winterson, to suggest that art objects/subjects act as material instigators for mystical revelation, ecstatic vision, and lives of sacred creativity.

**Panel #10: Student Panel: Buddhist Studies**

## **Meredith 234**

#1

“Meditation as an Inter-Religious Practice”

Dickyi Lhamo

Luther College

Decorah, Iowa

               Meditation is a broad term that encompasses various practices from a diverse group of religious traditions. It is the practice of focusing on the present moment and being aware of oneself and one’s surroundings without attaching any emotional reactions. The practice also involves seeing reality as it is and accepting it. Researchers have identified four types of meditation: focused attention, open monitoring, loving kindness or compassion meditation, and mantra meditation (Matko & Sedlmeier, 2019).  Focused attention meditation involves concentrating on one's breath or sensations from specific body parts or objects of interest. Open-monitoring meditation involves remaining in a monitoring state and attending to moments that arise without focusing on explicit objects (Lutz et al., 2008). Loving-kindness meditation involves developing love and kindness for oneself first and extending it to others (Lippelt et al., 2014). Mantra meditation involves repeatedly chanting words, phrases, or sets of syllables (Álvarez-Pérez et al.,2022).

               Meditation plays a significant role in Buddhism and Catholicism, regardless of the differences in the soteriological goals of these two traditions. It is one of the primary practices to achieve enlightenment in Buddhism and constitutes a form of prayer and contemplation that deepens the connections between the practitioner and God in Catholicism. They both practice the different forms of meditation mentioned above, or at least some of it. People who engage in meditation undergo a cognitive transformation. Neuroscience studies the neural processes that underlie these changes in the meditators. This indicates that meditation practices transcend cultural boundaries and serve as a tool for self-awareness, mindfulness, and personal transformation. In this paper, I will look at the meditation practices in Buddhism and Catholicism. I will utilize neuroscientific studies of meditation to analyze the transformations practitioners go through during and after their practices. Finally, I will suggest that meditation provides a method of inter-religious practice.

#2

“Reaching the Other Shore: Ven. Cheng Yen’s Meeting with Three Catholic Sisters as Encountering Nirmāṇakāya”

Duong Truong

Luther College

Decorah, Iowa

Ven. Cheng Yen is one of the most prominent bhikṣuṇī (nuns) in Taiwan and internationally. Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi, an influential and well-endowed Buddhist humanitarian NGO. As Tzu Chi engages in transnational and multi religious corporations, they need to integrate religious solidarity. This paper investigates the early hagiography of Cheng Yen, focusing on her meeting with three Catholic sisters in Hualien in 1966, as a model for interreligious dialogue.

When Cheng Yen and the sisters shared traditions’ teachings, they came to acknowledge the mutual theme of God’s love and Buddha’s compassion. The sisters appreciated the Dharma, but they questioned the praxis of Buddhists regarding social service. Although Cheng Yen skillfully, and apologetically, replied, she was still perplexed by the sisters’ question. Cheng Yen then aimed to unite Buddhists to serve the suffering humanity. The rest is the success of Cheng Yen’s Tzu Chi.

This meeting has a rich spiritual heritage for not just Tzu Chi, but a model for scholarly interpretation of interreligious dialogue. The meeting was a wondrous paradigm shift between Buddhist- Catholic. The sisters were the Nirmāṇakāya that assisted Cheng Yen to recognize her method of doing religion through practical giving actions. At the same time, Cheng Yen herself was Nirmāṇakāya that instructed the sisters the correct understanding of Buddhism and Buddhists.

Nirmāṇakāya, or the physical embodiment of the Buddha, constitutes a Buddhist means to teach and serve others. Nirmāṇakāya is not just an embodiment of the Buddha, but a point of connecting among us. Understanding dialogue with people of other traditions as encountering Nirmāṇakāya allows us to harmonize, rather than differentiate. Using the case study of Cheng Yen’s dialogue, I propose studying Nirmāṇakāya as a model to non-discriminately look at the goodness that different religious traditions hold and identifying how we can work together towards justice.

#3

“Kora at the Core:

Practitioner Movement and Sense Experience in the Boudhanath Stupa’s Form”

Madeleine Tevonian

Lawrence University

Appleton, Wisconsin

This paper is a discussion of the complex relationship between Buddhist practitioners and the sacred form of the Tibetan stupa (roughly described as reliquary mounds understood to be physical representations of the Buddha’s teachings). Through the case study of the Great Boudhanath Stupa in the Kathmandu Valley, I argue that liberative sense experience and movement-encoded cultural knowledge make practitioners a part of the stupa’s form—and thus necessary to any examination of it. Other interdisciplinary studies combine art historical formal analyses and religious studies concepts of sacred space and pilgrimage, but there aren’t many focusing solely on stupas—especially not studies that include extensive validation of movement theory and sense experience. Several questions arise from this lack of scholarship, which I strive to answer: how does the shape and scale of the stupa impact practice? How does movement play a role in religiosity? How does the iconography of the stupa engage the senses, and how do practitioners understand or think about this interaction? I begin with defining and providing background on stupas and some key Sanskrit and Tibetan terms, followed by a theoretical discussion of both Euro-American and Tibetan ideas of sacred space and of movement. The majority of my piece is then spent discussing form-based, historical, and anthropological details of the Boudhanath Stupa, in conversation with (primarily) Joanna Tokarska-Bakir’s essay on Tibetan liberation through the senses. This paper examines how the symbolism of the stupa as a whole interacts with the practitioner, which is important for an understanding of how and why stupas (and by extension many other artistic religious monuments) exist not simply as static structures, but as living and active centers of faith.

## **5:00-6:15**

## **Panel #11: Roundtable for the Religion and Science Unit**

## **Meredith 238**

## **Discussion of *Faith and Reason in the Reformations*, ed. Terence J. Kleven**, Proceedings of a conference on the Five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, 2017, sponsored by the Lilly Fellows Program and held at Central College, Pella, Iowa.

## *Jennifer Hockenbery*, St. Norbert College, De Pere, Wisconsin

## *Mark Mattes*, Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa

## *Douglas Kries*, Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington

## *Scott Culpepper*, Dordt University, Sioux Center, Iowa

## *Terence Kleven*, Central College, Pella, Iowa

## Presiders: *Robert Porwoll*, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, and *Terence Kleven*, Central College, Pella, Iowa

The purpose of this panel is to bring together both national and international scholars who participated in the Lilly conference at Central College, Pella, Iowa, in 2017. The proceedings of the conference were published in a book entitled Faith and Reason in the Reformations. The conference and the book were focused on the relation between religion and science, faith, and reason, as this topic pertains to the place of religion in education, public life, and scholarship. Published presentations were from five keynote speakers who were invited to attend and these speakers represented five different Christian theologies, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, and evangelical. The explorations of the book pertains not only to the unity of denominations of the Church but also has consequences for International Studies, foreign policy, educational theory, and Comparative Religion. Not all of the papers are on Christianity. The participants are: Mark Mattes, Douglas Kries, Jennifer Hockenbery, Scott Culpepper, Terence Kleven.