

Introduction

We are delighted to present this collection of essays on the topic of liberty and liberation. Reviewing our submissions for the first time, I sincerely felt that we had completely failed to generate a sufficient number of contributions on the topic of liberty and liberation to merit entitling this issue “Essays on Liberty and Liberation.” Perhaps, I thought, now that we have ventured into the grand age of economic and ethical libertinism, many may deem the study of the nature of liberty and liberation to be somewhat “passé,” a relic of a bygone era in which human beings were bound by “external norms.”

Fortunately, however, now that it comes to writing the introduction to this volume, I am ecstatic to note that, even though I was utterly convinced that our attempt to bring together a collection of essays on liberty and liberation had failed miserably, providence has intervened and helped me to recognize that most of the articles that we have selected for this volume relate to the concept of human liberty. This is especially reassuring, given that it is a major task of society and scholarship continually to question both the objective nature of liberty and the relation between authentic liberty and the concept of liberty that particular societies promote.

As a journal that prides itself on its interdisciplinarity and willingness to engage with a variety of insider and outsider perspectives in religion, we are delighted to present to the reader a number of articles from a variety of religious traditions and perspectives. On the topic of liberty and liberation in particular, we welcome contributions examining the rights that religious liberty provides in the eyes of the American court system, detailing the struggle of Québec Catholicism to free itself of external “paganizing” influences, examining the capacity of the human being to respond freely to the redemptive activity of God, reinterpreting pre-modern Islamic law in light of contemporary human rights theory, and describing the potentially liberatory function of Shia Ashura rituals.

In *Know It When They See It: American Courts Defining Religion*, Jamie Sutton (University of Georgia) examines the juridical history of the concept of religion. Sutton notes that early juridical rulings on the nature of religion, particularly *Davis v Beason* (1890), were animated by a desire to

enforce moral consensus (in this case, to inhibit protections for practitioners of polygamy): in a manner reminiscent of Thomas Hobbes' theory of conscience, *Davis v Beason* ruled that conscience pertains only to beliefs and does not compel the moral agent to pursue actions, in accordance with conscience, that are nevertheless inconducive to the well-being of society as a whole (as commonly understood), because only moral values that conform to the publicly-accepted moral norm can be understood to be authentically religious and thus subject to protection. Later rulings, however, focused more on the sincerity of the person's convictions as opposed to their veracity, a shift broadening the protection of religious convictions undertaken under the explicit influence of Paul Tillich's concept of ultimate concern. Despite the broadening of the concept of religion that this entails, the courts have managed to stave off a libertine moral free-for-all by reliance upon the principle of general applicability and by setting those protections attendant upon religious liberty into dependence upon other constitutional protections. These measures, however, entail avoiding the central question of whether something is really religious or not and whether specific protections are bound up with something on the basis of its distinctly *religious* aspect.

In *Making All Things New: The Mystical Anti-Modernism of Lacouturisme in Québec*, Jack Downey (La Salle University, Philadelphia) explores the context of the religious thought and activism of the prominent Québécois anti-modernist Jesuit, Onésime Lacouture. Situating Lacouturism in the context of the condemnation of the contemporaneous Feeneynite movement (censured for its adherence to an especially strict interpretation of the doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), Downey sees both movements as anti-modernist in different ways: whereas the Feeneyites focused upon the doctrine of the necessity of the Church for salvation; the Lacouturites focused upon counteracting the acculturation of the Church to modern society (its "paganization"). For Downey, Lacouturism's anti-modernism was rooted in the very self-consciousness of Québec society, which had historically understood itself as establishing traditional Catholicism in North America in the wake of liberalizing anti-religious movements in the Old World. As Downey writes, "in the wake of the trauma of the French Revolution, *Canadien* settlers envisioned migration to their newly adopted home through a cosmic lens that recapitulated the biblical sojourn in the wilderness from the Book of Exodus," viewing themselves as a "remnant of God's chosen who preserved the faith in exile from their native land."

As such, the liberalizing and secularizing trends in early- and mid-twentieth-century Québec Catholicism represented not only a challenge to the Church but to the very concept of Québec society itself, a challenge to which Lacouture, inspired by a mystical asceticism acquired through his experiences in the Alaskan tundra, felt himself obligated to respond.

In *Audience Participation: The Role of Witness in Hans Urs von Balthasar's* Theo-Drama, Martha Elias Downey (Concordia University, Montreal) exposts the relation between divine and human agency in the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Downey stresses the principal role of divine agency in Balthasar's understanding of salvation history: salvation history primarily pertains to God's action, and any discussion of human agency concerns only humanity's reaction to God's invitation to humanity. Given Balthasar's extensive work on the thought of Karl Barth, this emphasis upon the divine initiative in salvation history is not out of place. Balthasar, as Downey explains, develops the category of witness to explain the nature of the human response to God's free decision for humanity in Jesus Christ: humanity participates in the economy of salvation by being the audience before which the economy unfolds, and Downey uses the bi-valency of the term "witness" (as both "believer" and "martyr") to highlight how witnessing entails a responsive commitment-involving act on the part of the addressee of the Gospel, as it did for the apostles whose witness become a *martyrium*. Downey is concerned, however, that Balthasar's concept of witness does not go far enough, failing to provide a clear concept of humanity's distinctive *contribution* to salvation history, since, according to Downey, the Christian is called to be not only a believer but also a disciple of the Lord.

In *Philosophical Rhetoric and the "Divine Embodiment" in Origen of Alexandria*, Sergey Trostyanskiy (Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York) examines the philosophical rhetoric of late Platonism and its significance for the development of the notion of "divine embodiment" within the cultural horizon of third-century Alexandria. Reviewing the role and significance of rhetoric in classical culture and in third-century Christian tradition, Trostyanskiy claims that the origin of the "non-incarnational" Christology and of double subjectivity in Christ in the third century can be best thought of as a result of Origen of Alexandria's—one of the most remarkable figures of third-century Christianity—appropriation of the philosophical rhetoric of late Platonism. Trostyanskiy attempts to demonstrate that a natural outflow of Plato's late-period metaphysics of the

Nous, and of his philosophical rhetoric in third-century Christian discourse, was associated with the introduction of the concept of Jesus' pre-existing soul as a medium through which *Nous/Logos* could "come-to-be," the attribution of *kenosis* to the soul of Jesus, and the evocation of a participational model in Christology as the foundation of Christological thought at the time.

In *Public Reason, Reasonable Pluralism, and Religious Freedom: Re-Visiting the Criminalization of Apostasy in Pre-Modern Islamic Law*, Omar Edaibat (McGill University, Montreal) uses the celebrated liberal theorist John Rawls's understanding of reasonable beliefs in the public sphere as the frame of reference for a discussion of the possibility of reconciliation between Islamic law and modern liberalism. Edaibat argues that the criminalization of apostasy poses a considerable problem insofar as it appears to conflict with modern liberalism's affirmation of inalienable human rights, and so he seeks to re-evaluate the doctrines of the four classical sources of Islamic law in order to determine whether they necessarily warrant the absolute prohibition and criminalization of the act of apostasy. Edaibat claims that a doctrine of tolerance in respect of apostasy preponderated in the Koran, and he finds that, historically, the crime of apostasy, in the circumstances where it was punished by death, was habitually accompanied by other crimes like murder and open rebellion, which suggests that, in order to merit capital punishment for apostasy, one would have not only to abandon the religion of the Islamic community but also to participate in criminal attacks upon members of the community itself. Edaibat presents evidence for this interpretation from narrations of the Prophet's acts of pardoning those who abandoned Islam, and he concludes that that it is possible for Islamic law to re-consider the criminalization of apostasy in light of modern liberal human rights theory.

In *Ashura Rituals: A Tool for Freedom or Oppression? A Critical Examination of the Ashura Rituals of Shia Islam in Regards to Catherine Bell's Theory of Ritual*, Fatemeh Mohammadi (Carleton University, Ottawa) examines the socio-political significance of the Ashura rituals in Shia Islam. The Ashura rituals are mourning rites in commemoration of the death of the Hussein-ibn-Ali, who was killed while leading an insurrection to overthrow Caliph Yazid I. Mohammadi argues that these rituals have demonstrated themselves to be capable both of expressing discontent with the status quo and of suppressing such discontent by channeling the aspirations of the participants away from concrete, socio-political change to future, post-

mortem satisfaction. This latter function came into especial prominence with the emergence of the Safavid dynasty, which marked a period in which Shia Islam enjoyed political ascendancy in Persia. This deviation away from the this-worldly liberatory message of Hussein represented a corruption of Hussein's original message, but "the new message was also more apposite to the political, cultural, and economic status Shia now enjoyed": that is to say, its value as an impetus to anti-establishment political action ceased for Shia Muslims when representatives of Shia Islam acquired political power in Persia. However, the Ashura rituals reverted to their primordial liberatory function in the context of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, serving to express the people's grievances against the Shah's Government. Mohammadi also notes how the Ashura rituals were used by competing groups during the Iranian presidential elections of 2009, which she views as a sign of the intractability of these rituals: they have a power that cannot be easily managed by the dominant political class.

We are also delighted to present to the reader a number of reviews of recent publications.

There are many people whose invaluable assistance in the publication of this volume we must acknowledge. We are indebted to the members of the *Arc* advisory board, Dean Ellen Aitken and Prof. Gerbern S. Oegema, as well as to the staff at the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University who have liaised with us to bring this journal to publication: Samieun Khan, Francesca Maniaci, Deborah McSorley, and Alex Sokolov.

We note with considerable regret the death of the late Dean Ellen B. Aitken, Dean of the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University in Montreal. A most distinguished scholar and administrator, Dean Aitken was one of *Arc*'s most enthusiastic supporters, and she will be greatly missed. *Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine.*

We are deeply grateful for the assistance of all those who served on the peer-review board for this volume: Rula Jurdi Abisaab (McGill University); Gregory Baum (McGill University); Gennady Estraiikh (New York University); Mohammed Fadel (University of Toronto); Garth Green (McGill University); Ian Henderson (McGill University); Francis Russell Hittinger (University of Tulsa); Karen Kilby (University of Nottingham/Durham University); Torrance Kirby (McGill University); Suleiman Mourad (Smith College); Hasana Sharp (McGill University); N. Verbin (Tel Aviv University); Bill Wright (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga).

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Finally, we truly appreciate the inestimable forbearance of our respective spouses and children in helping us to balance our various academic, editorial, and family obligations.

Richard Paul Cumming
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