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Special Issue: Cultural and Religious Plurality within and across Religions

Religions Without Walls: An Ethnography

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s a sociologist of religion, I am equally inquisitive about the contexts within which theologies are birthed as in their content. Latin American Liberation Theologies have established that all theologies emanate from and respond to concrete social-political and historical realities. Scholars engaged in Religious Studies – theologians, anthropologists, sociologists of religion, etc. – as well as interested lay people, usually adhere to sociological and/or anthropological explanations for the religious and theological beliefs held by practitioners of the religious and spiritual traditions under study. This is particularly true for religions practiced by marginalized communities within their cultural and historical traditions. In my methods course on the study of urban life and religion, I consistently point out to my students that scholars of religion choose to study the religious practices of the marginalized as a means of discovering sociological and anthropological reasons for their belief systems, yet do not consider discovering, nor attempting to analyze the sociological and anthropological roots of religious practices among dominant groups in our society. Epistemological assumptions are made that validate some religions and subjugate others. For example, mainline Christianity – as it is found in Churches like Trinity Wall Street, St. Patrick's Cathedral or Riverside Church in NYC – is blindly accepted as pure and normative Christianity. In other words, there

are no serious attempts to understand why these churches and their adherents do what they do. The contexts in which these religions were birthed, and within which their belief systems emerged and formed, are disavowed as irrelevant as a tacit act of power. Therefore, from this institutionally privileged perspective it might seem logical and acceptable to say that Pentecostalism developed as a response or reaction to specific needs, such as emanating from the economic and political disenfranchisement of its followers, but such assumptions are not made about religious beliefs found among dominant sectors of our society.[1] Researchers rarely, if ever, conclude that places like Trinity Wall Street might be meeting the needs of perhaps their wealthy followers who need to theologically justify their priorities, investments and/or cultural elitism. In many ways this unconscious bias leads to the conclusion that some religious practices are unquestionably respectable and more "pure," as they are not perceived to emanate from specific socio-cultural, economic and political contexts or driven by human needs. Consequently, these beliefs and practices become part of the dominant "pure" or normative theology. To be clear, these and other unconscious value judgements cause me to be highly suspicious of the new theologies of pluralism, religions without walls, and interreligious engagement trends.

When anthropologists and sociologists embark upon ethnographic studies, the sociological and/or anthropological gaze is turned upon the subject of inquiry. I would contend that this gaze is rarely turned upon mainstream academic, cultural and theological production. We simply do not turn the gaze upon ourselves as we

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1. That is why, historically, the sociological theory depended upon to study Pentecostalism was that of the now debunked perspective called "deprivation theory." See: Killian McDonell, *Introduction in Charismatic Renewal and the Churches* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976).

arrive at scholarly conclusions. Quite often, simplistic forms of socio-analysis are instead performed that fail to consider more deeply the contexts from which our own espoused perspectives emerge. While we often acknowledge the obvious contexts, such as being male, White, heterosexual, etc., rarely analyzed are the roles of our places in academia or the historical and social conditions that give rise to our own theological productions.[2] For example, the process of globalization has inadvertently forced the rapid rise of economic, cultural, political and religious pluralism, which has propelled increased interest in inter-religious engagement/Inter-faith dialogue over the past twenty-five years. A review of the discussions and theologies produced by scholars might lead one to believe that interreligious theologies are the product of scholarly concern about engaging in dialogues that include diverse religious traditions, either because of a belief that it is the correct and moral thing to do, or because such scholars are enlightened progressives.[3] However, it was not until the process of globalization accelerated the movement of great numbers of immigrants and resulted in inescapable interactions between groups reflecting many different faith traditions, that interfaith dialogue was propelled. In other words, interreligious theologies were contextually motivated rather than altruistically inspired. Instead of explaining these phenomena in an ethnographically grounded political economy of social actors and institutions, many scholars retort to an auto-poetic default that individualizes what is ostensibly a social field in need of rigorous analysis and critique.

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2. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
3. Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace and Noah J. Silverman, eds., *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining A New Field* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

Religious scholars have assumed that they have consciously engaged in this work for the aforementioned ethical reasons, but in actuality those involved in this work have not necessarily overcome the biases, racism and prejudices previously perpetrated in most theological production.[4] This largely reactive push for interreligious dialogue is a response to having been thrust into the historical phenomenon of globalization. Globalization has accelerated religious pluralism in the United States – as it was already a society with an open and free religious market – providing fertile ground for the advent of religious diversity and supplying numerous and varied spiritual choices or commodities. Indeed, religious pluralism has brought vitality to the religious market.[5] However, liberal and progressive Christianity has not competed well in this environment, with mainline Christianity experiencing a steady decline in membership and relevance for over 75 years.[6] Fundamentalist and conservative churches and new religious movements have simultaneously flourished, leaving liberal/progressive Christianity to seek new modes of survival. To my surmise, declining mainline churches have turned towards interreligious engagement as an

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4. There has been the expectation that somehow interreligious theologies would correct this. See Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "The Promising Practice of Anti-Racist Approaches to interfaith Studies," in *Interreligious/interfaith Studies: Defining A New Field*, ed. Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace and Noah J. Silverman (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

5. See: Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776 –1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); S.R. Warner, "Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no.5 (March 1993): 1044–1093.

6. Gregory A. Smith, Alan Cooperman, Besheer Mohamed, Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac, Becka A. Alper, Kiana Cox, and Claire Gecewicz, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/.

opportunity to survive in a religiously pluralistic environment. For many years, religious scholars believed that all Christian churches were dying, when in reality they had simply ignored the growth occurring in non-liberal/progressive churches. Further hindering the growth of liberal/progressive churches are the still prevalent racism and hegemonic desire that continue to buttress the exclusion of Black and Brown spiritualities from the buffet of religions with which to engage.

Theological schools and secular universities have more readily shifted their curricula to deal with the societal challenges of the epoch but seem ideologically blocked from considering shifts in their curricula to include representation of Black and/or Brown citizens, community members, neighbors, students, and consumers who have comprised segments of their communities in significant numbers for decades or longer. Further, interreligious engagement studies in these schools and universities preclude a recognition of and engagement with religious traditions practiced by disenfranchised members of society, regardless of whether the schools themselves are located within communities practicing these traditions. To do so would require an approach that would include giving up privileging Euro-centric analyses, and a willingness to cease the safeguarding of our theological ethnophilosophies lest they become completely irrelevant. As Dr. Rivera Colon has argued: "Maybe the problem is that Euro-American theological production has to account for itself."[7] A recent conversation with Rev. Raymond Rivera, founder and executive director of the Latino Pastoral Action Center, developed this point further when he discussed his feeling that theologies of pluralism might have to engage in dialogue with marginalized

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7. Telephone conversation with Dr. Edgar Rivera-Colon on July 10th, 2020.

religious practices and begin to approach interreligious dialogue from a "deficit model." According to Rivera, this approach must acknowledge the history of colonial brutality and white supremacy underpinning Christian theologies.[8]

The well-intended emphasis on interreligious studies is accompanied by a methodology steeped in the ways of Euro-centric Christian dominance. Historically, the leading perpetrators of religious imperialism and hegemony have been Western European agents of Christianity:[9] the same community that is now "leading" the religious engagement dialogue. Is this starting point best suited for the development of a theology without walls? These problematic issues are intimately tied to the place from which these pluralistic theologies emanate. For example, who decides which are the religious traditions to be engaged in inter-religious dialogue? I'm not suggesting that it is an impossible task, but how can we safeguard against the inherent problems that will arise? Failure to address these pitfalls would be analogous to tasking the White community with determining how best to rid our society of racism or asking the police to take the lead in reforming abusive policing.

Let us discuss some of these inherent challenges within the current theologies of pluralism. In a conversation with Dr. Paul Knitter, a friend, former colleague, and leading voice in the movement of theological inter-religious engagement, he suggested that only traditions active in social justice should be engaged in inter-religious dialogue. Obviously, all theological perspectives have foundational beliefs that are important for those who

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8. Telephone conversation with Rev. Raymond Rivera on July 7th, 2020.
9. See Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990).

subscribe to them. However, in order to engage others, if we begin by imposing such limited categories – in this case one that is not even accepted by all within the Christian tradition – the perils of exclusion and omission become unavoidable. In my estimation, this scholar has made a misguided assumption that permeates liberal/progressive theologies: that religion should be mainly about social justice. I happen to subscribe to Latin American Liberation Theology which can be considered the social justice theology par excellence, yet I cannot assume that religious thought should only regard liberationist perspectives. That would be arrogant, and an axiomatic generalized imposition on religious thought. I shared with Dr. Knitter my concern about his premise, and he acknowledged that it was his prejudice, conceding that it might be problematic. He added that he saw another problem in his analysis, saying: "I am a Christian who believes Jesus has very important things to say, and that they should be heard."[10] Herein lies a theoretical/epistemological problem that is even more problematic than his admitted bias: Euro-American scholars make the assumption that because they are aware of a problem, the problem is thereby resolved.[11] Knowledge of this particular bias did not prompt this scholar to remove it from his theological work, nor did it help him to acknowledge how it could possibly affect his theological production.

The issue of text-based vs. oral religious traditions as related to interreligious dialogue has caught the attention of theorists from the global south who have questioned why the text-based community has captured the attentions of those interested in

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10. Telephone conversation with Dr. Paul Knitter on October 14th, 2019.
11. Foucault called this a "ruse of knowledge." See "Truth and Method," in *An Introduction to Foucault's Thought with Major New Unpublished Material*, ed. Paul Rainbow (Pantheon Books, New York, 1984).

engaging these text-based traditions while marginalizing orally based traditions. Why are religious traditions that have texts privileged over the oral traditions? I posed this question to Dr. Edgar Rivera Colon, a cultural and narrative medicine anthropologist who responded that, "text allows for the codification and centralization which enable elites to mobilize their power for political and social control."[12] Texts are usually found within the domain of the erudite, giving them the ability to determine what is worthy of study and even provides opportunities for the appropriation of the traditions of others who do not have scholarly tools at their disposal. Oral traditions are more likely to be problematic for those who want to take ownership of a discipline or tradition, and since oral traditions are more fluid, they are not as easily susceptible to being manipulated by elites. R. S. Sugirtharajah argues that the field of New Testament studies was to some extent developed as a way of maintaining hegemony of thought as the empire expanded.[13] We should therefore ask ourselves if the absence of oral religious traditions in inter-religious dialogue reflects an unconscious decision to maintain a colonial hold on theological discourses in post-colonial era. From a practical perspective, "dead text" is much more easily manipulated than lived experience as expressed through words and actions. Gustavo Gutierrez defined theology as "critical reflection on Praxis."[14] He emphasized that theology begins with lived experience which cannot be as easily manipulated as dead text. Francisco C. Rolim, a sociologist of religion and scholar of

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12. Conversation with anthropologist Dr. Edgar Rivera Colon.

13. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

14. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 9.

Brazilian Pentecostalism, in providing his analysis of the practice of speaking in tongues, makes the observation that adherents of Brazilian Pentecostalism engage in speaking unknown languages thereby rejecting the verbal which is controlled by the erudite.[15] Practitioners and leaders of Pentecostalism in Brazil and throughout Latin America are aware of the intentions of seminary trained religious leaders who want to take control of the spiritualities of marginalized groups as well as their religious traditions. It is for this reason that participants will often hear Pentecostal leaders declare that, although they might not have formal university and seminary training, they have been trained by the Holy Spirit in bible, prayer and fasting. Pentecostal followers and leaders are acutely aware that textual erudition can be used to usurp indigenous leadership and result in the appropriation of their religious traditions. The presumptuous practice by the North of defining what religion is, and determining what is legitimate, good, acceptable or unacceptable religion, will continue to transpire as long as the means of religious production are controlled by those who are located in the center of the empire.

Cultural and religious racism and elitism also threaten the integrity of any inter-religious engagement. I would argue that this pitfall becomes especially problematic in the case of liberal/progressive scholars, as there seems to be a belief among liberals/progressives in general, that they are devoid of any racist and elitist views. It is compelling to witness the readiness with which religious and theological scholars forget the historical legacy of misogyny, homophobia, racism and classism found in the history of the Christian theological enterprise, as well as that of many other

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15. Francisco C. Rolim, *Pentecostes No Brasil: Uma Interpretacao Socio-Religiosa* (Rio de Janeiro: Petropolis Vozes, 1980).

religious traditions. On one occasion during which I was lecturing on Haitian Vodou, this eminent scholar, who happens to be a leader of inter-religious dialogue, Dr. Paul Knitter, asked me if I had "dealt with the problem of evil in Vodou." [16] I was initially confused by the question because my intent in studying any religious tradition or movement is to understand its history and expressions among adherents. Once it became clear to me that this question emerged from ignorant and racist ideas about Haitian Vodou, and the reality set in that these biases are held by scholars and lay persons alike, I was able to respond. I answered, "I have not focused on the evil perpetrated by Vodou, if any exists, because it is insignificant compared to the evils perpetrated by the Church throughout the last two millennia." Knitter made the assumption that Vodou, the principal religion of Haiti, is evil. He relegated its core essence – not to philosophy, medicine, justice, spirituality – but to performing evil using pins, needles, and dolls. After the lecture, I asked Dr. Knitter – my friend and colleague – what he was thinking with regard to his question, and he acknowledged that he was operating under the stereotypical and racist assumptions portrayed in popular culture about Vodou. Dr. Knitter was apparently operating under the assumption made by many scholars and lay people that Haitian Vodou is a "primitive religion." In order to rouse my students from blind adherence to societal biases regarding religion and religious traditions, I will frequently discuss how interesting it is that we view the sacrifice of a chicken in a Santeria or Haitian Vodou ritual to the orishas as primitive, yet we are perfectly comfortable participating in and/or condoning the ritual of the Holy Eucharist in which believers eat the body and drink the blood of a man who died

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16. I am grateful to Dr. Paul Knitter for engaging with me in conversation about these issues and for allowing me to speak of these two issues on which I had challenged him.

two thousand years ago.

The religious practice of ritualistic sacrifice of chickens and other animals by practitioners of the Lucumi religion has been regarded with contempt, not only by religious sectors but by political and juridical institutions. In 1987, the city of Hialeah, South Florida, passed an ordinance prohibiting animal sacrifice *in religious ceremonies* for the purpose of ending the ritual sacrifice of animals in public or private religious ceremonies. The new law did not prohibit the killing of animals, but only banned their killing as part of religious ceremonies. This prohibition was adopted after adherents of Santeria, a Cuban-African religion whose religious rituals include the sacrifice of chickens, goats, sheep, ducks and other animals, announced plans to open a church on an abandoned used car lot in Hialeah. When the city council heard that the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye was coming to its city they enacted the ordinance. The church filed a lawsuit in the United States district court for the Southern District of Florida seeking that the Hialeah ordinance be declared unconstitutional. In order to maintain their sacred religious rituals, the church had to challenge this ordinance through the courts, all the way to the supreme court. The case, *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993), was decided in favor of the Lukumi Babalu Aye by the Supreme Court of the United States. The Court affirmed the principle that laws targeting specific religions violate the free-exercise clause of the First Amendment – which states that the government shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion – and held that the ordinance passed in Hialeah, Florida, forbidding the "unnecessary" killing of "an animal in a public or private ritual or ceremony not for the primary purpose of food consumption," was unconstitutional. What makes this case interesting is that so many people were concerned with the ritual

sacrifice of chickens and goats as cruel and primitive, but most have never complained about the cruel treatment and killings of millions of chickens a year in poultry farms throughout developed countries across the world, including the United States.[17]

How can religious scholars disengage from the wider biases about religion that are so ingrained in the fabric of our culture? As with racism, religious marginalization can also take the form of eroticizing the religious practices of the other. The following example elucidates the other side of the problem in which the denigration of Santeria is manifested in an eroticizing of the ritual sacrifice of animals. I had a student from a Scandinavian country who wanted to conduct her field work and major interview for my class with a priest or priestess of the Lucumi tradition. We identified the spiritual leader with whom she would engage in conversation throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, she expressed her frustration with this Lucumi priest, explaining that he would never answer her questions and would instead speak only about what he wanted to discuss. It turns out that she was only interested in knowing about the rituals of animal sacrifices and focused her many questions only on this aspect among so many others in this religious tradition. The priest eventually informed me that he felt that she, like many who want to learn about African diasporic religions, was simply interested in what she perceived to be exotic aspects of the traditions. He shared his view that this student, like many others who diminish the significance of his traditions, failed to demonstrate any serious interest in its philosophies, belief system and spirituality. Certainly, I am not suggesting that outsiders cannot

17. Compilations Net, "Live Fast, Die Young, The Life of a Meat Chicken," September 13, 2017, YouTube Video, 7:58. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2rP_jgCAQ0.

accomplish honest ethnographic studies. However, any attempt to do this type of research without reflexive analysis can only lead to misguided, simplistic and even dangerous conclusions. We must keep in mind that there is ample historical information about the many ways in which racial ideology has influenced theological, sociological and anthropological studies.

How do we rid ourselves, for example, of notions of superiority regarding monotheism over polytheism that are proudly touted by adherents of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as well as by other monotheistic religious traditions? Although polytheism is not an inferior theological position to that of monotheism, certain traditions have been mislabeled by scholars as polytheistic, perhaps in attempts to malign them, when some would argue they are not. African theologian Olupona makes the observation that what some western theologians and religious scholars perceive to be polytheistic theologies in certain African religions, in actuality are more analogous to what he would characterize as Bureaucratic monotheism (his term). Olupona contends that these African theologies are actually very similar to the monotheism of Christianity in which there is a system composed of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as angels and other spirits.[18]

The classist and racist disparagement of religions on the margins goes far beyond scholarly characterizations, such as syncretic, primitive, polytheistic and extends beyond these labels into judgements such as evil, witchcraft and even sorcery – terminologies and ideas that emerge from cultural and societal realms even more than from the academic world. Without serious socio-analysis of the theological field itself, a valid theology of

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18. Caleb O. Olupona, *The Development of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Yoruba (African) Indigenous Christian Movement* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

pluralism will always be a truncated or failed project. We must understand how we determine what constitutes religion, how positive and negative attributes are ascribed to religious traditions, and how decisions are made regarding which religions are worthy of studying/engaging. As stated by, Pierre Bourdieu:

> Because religion, like all symbolic systems, is predisposed to fulfill a function of association and dissociation or, better, of distinction, a system of practices and beliefs is made to appear as magic or sorcery, an inferior religion, whenever it occupies a dominated position in the structure of relations of symbolic power, that is, in the system of relations between the systems of practices and beliefs belonging to a determined social formation.[19]

If symbolic systems like religion, can provide cultural capital not only for its practitioners, but also to religious scholars, then we can make the assumption that the research and engagement of different religious traditions is influenced by the status ascribed to these traditions by the dominant society. How can engagement of religious tradition "A," located in the upper socio-cultural and economic sector of society, enhance our academic careers as opposed to engagement of marginalized religious tradition "B," located within the lower socio-economic strata? Following Bourdieu's logic, the engagement of a specific religion can provide capital to the agent of its engagement. In addition, we might be led more readily to study the more culturally acceptable and/or powerful traditions within the particular historical milieu in which our research is being done.

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19. Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field," in *Comparative Social Research* vol. 13, ed. Craig Calhoun (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1991), 12.

Examples found within societal and cultural realms can clearly illustrate the unwitting formation of such biases. Widely accepted throughout our country is the myth that we have model minorities (i.e., Asian immigrants). In reality, this myth has hurt Asian immigrants and other immigrant groups in a myriad of ways, such as by widely perpetuating a "blame game" that has not only shamed struggling members of Asian communities, but has also scapegoated other immigrant communities, including African Americans. This false narrative has given rise to an eroticizing of Asian culture, especially among white liberal/progressives. In the 1960's many artists and cultural revolutionaries turned to Asian religious traditions for answers to their spiritual quests with adherence to spiritual groups emerging from India becoming fashionable.[20] Clearly, it has not yet been fashionable to join, engage or align with spiritual groups found among African American or Latinx communities. The religions of the "model" minority instead captured the interests of Westerners in search of spiritual connectedness, as countless adherents and/or practitioners of these religious traditions can be found today as throughout recent decades. In similar fashion, White couples seem to prefer to adopt Asian children, with Asian adoptions tripling in the last 25 years, while the adoption of Black children has only decreased here in the United States.[21] Another example can be seen with scholars engaged in comparative literature studies, as they ascribe to Euro-centric biases when choosing which traditions to highlight. Cultural critic

20. See: Vijay Prashad, *Uncle Swami: South Asians in America Today* (New York: The New Press, 2012).
21. Nicholas Zill, "The Changing Face of Adoption in the United States," Charlottesville, VA: Institute for Family Studies, 2017, https://ifstudies.org /blog/the-changing-face-of-adoption-in-the-united-states.

Rey Chow's critique of comparative literature aptly applies to theologies of pluralism:

> Of all the prominent features of Eurocentrism, the one that stands out in the context of the university is the conception of culture as based on the modern European notion of the nation state. In this light, comparative literature has been rightly criticized for having concentrated on the literatures of a few strong nation-states in modern Europe. But the problem does not go away if we simply substitute India and China, and Japan for England, France, and Germany. To this day we still witness publications that bear titles such as comparative approaches to "masterpieces of Asian literature" which adopt precisely this Eurocentric, nation-oriented model of literature in the name of the other. In such instances, the concept of literature is strictly subordinated to social Darwinian understanding of the nation: 'masterpieces' correspond to 'master' nations and 'master' cultures. With India, China and Japan being held as representative of Asia, cultures of lesser prominence in Western reception such as Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Tibet and others simply fall by the wayside—as marginalized 'others' to the 'other' that is the 'great' Asian civilizations.[22]

In the introduction to *Theology Without Walls: The Transreligious Imperative* (2020), I was astonished by the following claim made by Jerry L. Martin:

> The trans-religious turn follows ineluctably from the discovery, profound in its depths and implications, of divine or ultimate truth in multiple traditions.[23]

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22. Rey Chow, "In the Name of Comparative Literature," in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 109.
23. Jerry L. Martin, ed., *Theology Without Walls: The trans-religious Imperative* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 1.

Martin seems to make the assumption that religious thinking is preoccupied with ultimate truth and with the divine. One must then conclude, following his logic, that religious traditions which do not have an interest in the divine need not be engaged, nor do these traditions offer any useful theology. Further, does this imply that traditions which do not bear the arrogance of seeking "the ultimate truth" need not be engaged? Even more egregious than these aforementioned biases is the inherent arrogance of his statement, which is predicated upon the belief that the criteria of theological production must be evaluated by Christian, Judaic and Muslim perspectives. I wonder where he would place theological and religious thought that is not interested or arrogant enough to claim to know about the divine or about ultimate realities?

In actuality, the search for ultimate reality is not necessarily a priority or even highly emphasized within many Christian traditions. In the more "progressive" sectors of U.S. Latinx theologies, the emphasis of religious thought is the "cotidiano"[24] which places far more emphasis on the impact of thought upon daily life in the here and now. A search for what may be the ultimate truth is far less important. African religious traditions in the diaspora are also less interested in understanding ultimate reality and far more concerned about how to live in harmony with the surrounding world around them (i.e., other people, the earth and all living creatures).[25]

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24. In Mujerista theology, *lo cotidiano* (everyday life) focuses on the struggles that Latinx women deal with on a daily basis. See Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the 21st Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

25. See: Jacob K. Olupona, ed., *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (St. Paul MN: Paragon House, 1991); Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Joseph Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

A theology of religions, in my perspective, has a great deal to learn from practitioners of religions on the margins of society. Although double belonging has become more fashionable and appears to be a new theological discovery, this has existed in a far more fluid manner for a long time. Latinx scholars of religion have long realized that Latinx communities' practice what we termed "multiple religious affiliations." Scholars of interreligious engagement should take an interest in understanding how this has been accomplished for hundreds of years by people who had to negotiate the existence of multiple cosmologies or roads to the divine. Similarities between the theologies without walls found in African diasporic religious thought and the euro-centric theologies of the twenty-first century can be seen.

The late anthropologist of religion Karen McCarthy Brown argued that:

> Christianity is like a concrete wall – new ideas come to it and they bounce off – and African religious traditions found in the Diaspora are like amoebas which are able to absorb new ideas and make them a part of the system. The hegemonic DNA of Christianity and Islam are problematic in their potential for participating in interreligious theologies with theological humility and integrity.[26]

And simply knowing that reality is not enough to neutralize its force when attempting to do theologies of pluralism/religion without walls. I would contend that there are several factors which contribute to this hegemonic disposition: power/control, false notions of purity, lack of humility, and a failure to be grounded in reality.

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26. This statement was made by Dr. McCarthy Brown at Drew University when I was in her doctoral seminar for the Newark Project in the year 2001.

Religious thought most frequently provides legitimation of the political and economic structure of a society. In order for political and religious systems to maintain control they have to convince a majority of people in the society that their political or religious system of belief is not only the correct one, but also that it is the only meaningful choice. Maintaining this control without challenges has been a critical aspect of American Christianity, as this religious tradition buttresses a capitalist Eurocentric and American political system, including its White supremacist ideology that resides in the underbelly of its foundation. Maintaining power and control are of utmost essence for these imperialistic oriented traditions. The false notion of purity has been essential in maintaining a hierarchical and stratified religious field. Historically, throughout the anthropological and theological study of religion, the African based religions were pejoratively referred to as syncretistic – a method of devaluing the traditions that joined two or more traditions into one – while dominant religions were sanctioned as "pure" religious traditions, and consequently exalted. For centuries to the recent times, the false notion of purity was viewed as an accurate portrayal of Christianity despite obvious evidence to the contrary, specifically sociological and anthropological evidence of the fluid nature of all religious systems and spiritual traditions. Culture and cultural systems are always changing and constantly in flux, including a borrowing and mixing with other cultural traditions. It is indisputable that Christianity is made up of different religious and philosophical traditions which include, at a minimum: Judaism, Greco-Roman culture, neo-platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, and other social thought.

Apart from its birth – and a few additional exceptions, as noted above – Christianity has not grounded itself in concrete lived reality. It can instead be characterized as a religious tradition that

has been more concerned with esoteric ideas about the ultimate and more preoccupied with divinity than with spiritual interaction in daily life.[27] In order for Christianity to be engaged in truly interreligious conversations, those attempting to foster this process must become aware of their positions as stakeholders in the process. Scholars must relinquish the assumption that Christianity and dominant religious traditions located at the centers of power are normative and instead must begin to operate as if the theological traditions coming forth from the Christian discipline are as mutable, syncretistic and fluid as any belief system located at the margins of our society. Scholars must become sentient in unraveling unconscious methodological approaches which lead to assumptions that a Eurocentric understanding of religious thought is the norm. Critically important to the purity of this process is to heed the far-reaching, albeit unconscious, influences that classism and racism have on our theological and methodological production. The late, internationally renowned, philosopher and sociologist of religion, Otto Maduro, always reminded me that we must exercise humility in our pursuit of knowledge. I believe this is critical advice that we all should heed.

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27. See Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Eduardo Mendietta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

Theological Intonation: Opening Dialogue Between Confessional Theology and Religious Studies

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T his article is addressed primarily to theologians and secondarily to religious studies scholars who might dialogue with them. It seeks to highlight a subtle change in tone of voice, inflection, and posture that will assist theologians with confessional presuppositions in opening up productive exchanges with those who do not share their presuppositions. The need for improving this exchange was highlighted by Thomas Tweed in his 2015 presidential address to the American Academy of Religion, where he observed that we often "talk past one another or don't talk at all."[1] This article explores resources for this endeavour in the work of Tyler T. Roberts, who, from the standpoint of a religious studies scholar, has called for the inclusion of theology in religious studies. It also sets such a dialogue within the philosophy of religious studies articulated by Jim Kanaris, a philosophy which seeks to move the conversation beyond the dichotomies of confining religion to "the examination of publicly observable phenomena"[2] or defending religious subjectivity from such reductionism. Since religious studies emerged historically from

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1. Thomas Tweed, "Valuing the Study of Religion: Improving Difficult Dialogues Within and Beyond the AAR's 'Big Tent,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84, no. 2 (June 2016): 287.
2. Jim Kanaris, "Introduction," *Reconfigurations of Philosophy of Religion: A*

Christian theology seeking a place of objectivity, it has often taken great pains to distance itself from its subjectively engaged parent. One strategy has been to exclude theology from religious studies as an ideology that does not properly belong in academia. This is represented today by the new materialist approach of scholars such as Russell McCutcheon, which largely reduces the study of religion to historical, cultural, psychological, and sociological factors, revealing the political structures of power behind religious ideology and practice.[3] Another strategy has been to invite theology back to the family table under certain conditions. For instance, Sheila Greeve Davaney has advocated for the place of "academic theologians" in the religious studies conversation, provided they operate as a subset of religious studies. As such, they must consent to the reduction of the study of religion to a "naturalizing and culturizing of the human phenomena we study."[4] This sounds like new materialist rules to the game. Paula Cooey widened her invitation slightly to include those theologians who would dialogue on the common (albeit shaky) ground provided by Kantian-style presuppositions.[5] Both inclusions implicitly exclude confessional

Possible Future, ed. Jim Kanaris (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 176.

3. Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 45, 47; cf. Tyler T. Roberts, "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism in the Study of Religion," *Journal of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2005): 369–76.

4. Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Rethinking Theology and Religious Studies," in *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University: Conflicting Maps, Changing Terrain*, ed. Linell E. Cady and Delwin Brown (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 150.

5. Paula Cooey, "The Place of Academic Theology in the Study of Religion from the Perspective of Liberal Education," in *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University: Conflicting Maps, Changing Terrain.*, ed. Linell E. Cady and Delwin Brown (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 179.

theologians who operate from revelational presuppositions, thereby depriving religious studies of quintessential insider voices. However, Roberts' approach may allow theologians to enter into the conversation with their presuppositions not only intact, but even functioning to enhance the dialogue.

We will first outline Roberts' critique of the new materialist exclusion of theology from the academic study of religion on the basis that it is ideology. In two landmark articles, Roberts successfully turns the tables on the new materialists by revealing the ideology present in their own approach.[6] He also questions their characterization of theology as a particular kind of ideology – inherently self-authorizing, shielded from critical inspection, and stabilizing. He offers examples of theologians who speak about God in ways that are the opposite of this characterization and can thus contribute productively. Secondly, the specifics of Roberts' approach will be reviewed. He demonstrates the viability of contributing to the study of religion by "think[ing] critically in and through, as opposed to distanced from, our attachments."[7] Thirdly, I connect Roberts' approach with the religious studies philosophy of Jim Kanaris, which allows for both subjective involvement in religious concerns and critical self-reflexivity to find points of objective analysis. Fourthly, this article will explore Roberts' identification of a particular way of speaking theologically, which I am referring to as theological intonation. Examples will be provided

6. Tyler T. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation: On the New Protectionism in the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 1 (2004): 143–72; Roberts, "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism in the Study of Religion"; cf. Kanaris, "Introduction," xviii; Tweed, "Valuing the Study of Religion," 295.

7. Tyler T. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness Between Philosophy and Religion," in *Reconfigurations of Philosophy of Religion: A Possible Future*, ed. Jim Kanaris (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 194.

from a variety of Roberts' works that are viable from the context of confessional theology.[8] In a sense, we will conclude by redirecting Roberts' insights from how religious studies can approach theology to how theology can approach religious studies. A summary will be provided of ways of being and speaking theologically that open up a disruptive and seminal two-way dialogue between confessional theology and religious studies in a "postmodern" environment.

Destabilizing Ideology in Theology and Religious Studies

In "Exposure and Explanation: On the New Protectionism in the Study of Religion" (2005) and "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism in the Study of Religion" (2005), Roberts argues that new materialist approaches to religious studies need to acknowledge their own ideology, which creates "an unsupportable opposition between religion and scholarship."[9] New materialist approaches to religious studies characterize their work as non-ideological and critically self-reflexive, while framing religion or theology itself as a non-critical enterprise[10] that cannot be engaged with except as "data."[11] A new materialist definition of religion offered by Bruce Lincoln in *Guide to the Study of Religion* (2000) says its "defining characteristic" is that it "invest[s] specific human preferences with transcendent status by misrepresenting them as revealed truths, primordial traditions, divine commandments and so forth."[12] There

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8. Tyler T. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic Imperative: Narrative and Renunciation in Taylor and Hauerwas," *Modern Theology* 9, no. 2 (April 1993): 181–200; Tyler T. Roberts, *Encountering Religion: Responsibility and Criticism After Secularism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
9. Roberts, "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism," 369.
10. Roberts, "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism," 374, 372.
11. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 145.
12. As quoted in Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 147.

is little room for conversation if religious studies begins with an ideological judgement that theology is a fundamental "misrepresentation" that obscures material reality.[13] Nor are their ears tuned to hear protests from theological insiders that outsiders in religious studies may be misrepresenting their religion because the data is not supposed to talk back.[14] Theology itself is deemed to be conversation-ending due to its totalizing appeals to transcendent authority, stabilization of current power structures, and being closed to critical questioning.[15]

Roberts begins his response by highlighting several theologians – Rowan Williams, Charles Winquist, and Francis Fiorenza – none of whom speak in these ways.[16] In fact, these sophisticated and engaging thinkers are willing to destabilize their own viewpoints and provide resources for a helpful destabilization of the ideology of the new materialists. While they do have certain faith presuppositions, they are also willing to complicate their positions by acknowledging historical and social factors in approaching religious texts, authority, and the creation of religion. They are open to dialoguing with new materialists about such factors, and new materialists could, in turn, benefit from some complicating of their exclusively materialist explanations for religion.[17] These theologians are not the enemies of enlightenment, modernity, or even post-modernity, but surprisingly experimental

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13. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 155.
14. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 154.
15. Roberts, "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism," 372–75; Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 150.
16. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 151.
17. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 155.

thinkers[18] who often engage productively in discourses beyond the borders of theology.[19]

Depending on how a theologian approaches terms such as "God" or "transcendence," these terms can actually disrupt human certainties about reality.[20] Influenced by Derrida, Lacan, and Levinas, thinkers such as Eric Santner, Hent de Vries, and Winquist function in borderlands between philosophical, religious, and theological discourse, and are able to formulate "theologically inflected critique[s]" that challenge both *sui generis* and materialist formulations of religious studies.[21]

Besides offering critique, theology also provides language and practice appropriate for "singularity." In dealing with the sign "God," theology has developed tools for dealing with a singularity that goes beyond the bounds of language and exposes the incompleteness of any discourse. These tools can be used for dealing with singularity as it is experienced in many areas: the "me" beyond my predicates, the discontinuities of material explanations of experience, and the incompleteness of encounter with any "other."[22] "God" indicates both a gap in a discourse and "an indicator of something more."[23] Roberts quotes De Vries' (controversial) re-definition of theology as "no longer […] church dogmatics, or biblical exegesis, but as the self-articulation, exposition, and re-enactment of faith […] that brings us face to face,

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18. Roberts, "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism," 385, 389.
19. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 153.
20. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 160; Roberts, "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism," 378–379.
21. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 160–61.
22. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 161–62.
23. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 163.

not with God, but with our forgetfulness vis à vis God."[24] It is a simultaneous motion toward and away from God (*à dieu* and *adieu*) as "it tries to speak finitely about the infinite and acknowledges that this effort necessarily fails."[25] This is in line with St. Augustine's admission: "What intellectual capacity has a man got to grasp God with, if his own intellect with which he wishes to grasp him still eludes his grasp?"[26]

It must be noted, though, that such humility about our ability to adequately speak about God is balanced for confessional theologians by a presupposition that God has spoken to us in revelation. This presupposition is often seen as a barrier for conversation with religious studies, which views it as a conversation-ending "limit-setter." However, revelation can also be understood as a traumatic disruption of "the ways we make sense of ourselves and our world."[27] As Roberts notes via Santner, revelation "'is not so much the positing of an alternative and competing standard of value as *an intervention into the very syntax by which values are determined*.'"[28] As such, revelation forms discontinuities that can become fruitful points of opening conversation. This accords well with the Christian perception of Jesus as the one whose very person upset the order of the world, and whose words declared

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24. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 163. See also: Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 221.
25. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 153.
26. Saint Augustine, *The Trinity: De Trinitate*, ed. John Rotelle O.S.A., trans. Edmund Hill O.P., 2nd ed., vol. 5, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2012), bk. 5.0.2.
27. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 163.
28. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 164. Emphasis added by Roberts. See also: Eric Santner, *On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 97.

the last first and the little great. As J. Z. Smith has observed, if Jesus was a revelation, he was so in the form of a riddle.[29] Roberts makes the case that new materialists, who have otherwise followed the lead of Smith, may have missed an opportunity to develop the rhetoric of incongruity, which he sees as central to religion.[30]

In Winquist, Santner, and de Vries, Roberts finds a humble theology that is certainly not "queen of the sciences" and not even a confession of faith, but rather "a minor literature" (a demotion theologians may balk at). While largely unacknowledged by new materialists, this kind of theology shares in a larger program of discourse critique with religious studies and other disciplines, a program which should be conscious of how "theological terms, tropes, and concepts continue to shape modern and postmodern ethical and political discourses."[31] Given this shaping influence, theology should be viewed as a discipline that can be "interruptive and critical rather than systematizing and stabilizing"[32] – something Roberts asserts becomes clear when we "examine critically the bonds of ideology and identity from the perspective of a [socially intelligible] self-consciousness that recognizes the futility of searching for an identity free of such bonds," and which, moreover, is open to that which is beyond ourselves.[33] Roberts challenges

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29. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 300–301.
30. Tyler T. Roberts, "Encountering Incongruity: On J. Z. Smith," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87, no. 1 (March 2019): 38–39, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfy049.
31. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 165.
32. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 165; Robert's expands upon this point in "From Secular Criticism to Critical Fidelity," *Political Theology* 18, no. 8 (December 2017): 693–708, https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2017.1333816.
33. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 165.

McCutcheon and the like to acknowledge that they too are embedded in their own ideologies and values and thus cannot claim an academic neutrality that is free of them.[34] Why is new materialism set on *explaining* religion largely in terms of material causes? Why is religious ideology perceived only as repressive rather than as something which contains aspects of liberation? These questions reveal values that must be examined, and in many cases, reveal an anti-religious bias rather than neutrality.[35] McCutcheon might have once responded that it was materialist explanations that were being forced out of religious studies by *sui generis* ones, and that no one explanation of religion is adequate.[36] But Roberts has demonstrated that the pendulum has now swung too far in the opposite direction, to the exclusion of religious and theological explanations. Although Roberts is addressing new materialists, Martin Kavka notes that he leaps from a critique of their ideology to an assertion of the value of including insider discussions about divinity/divinities without much argumentation.[37] But theology can model how such a leap can be made by holding to its value presuppositions self-critically.

An "Enecstatic" Philosophy of Religious Studies

Before we explore the specifics of Roberts' approach in "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness Between Philosophy and

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34. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 166.
35. Cf. Davaney, "Rethinking Theology," 143–146.
36. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 28, 48.
37. Martin Kavka, "Review: Encountering Religion: Responsibility and Criticism After Secularism, by Tyler T. Roberts," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 76, no. 1 (August 2014): 97, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-013-9440-3.

Religion" (2018), I would like to spend some time articulating Jim Kanaris' "enecstatic" philosophy of religious studies, as I believe Roberts' approach fits well within Kanaris' vision for the field. This will be achieved by an exploration of a chapter from a forthcoming monograph by Kanaris.

Kanaris is responding to an ethos that Cooey describes well: "poststructuralist epistemologies challenge the very notion of a stable subject who can know without reference to the subject's […] interests, values, and social location" and is thus unable to achieve objectivity.[38] Kanaris' philosophy modifies Bernard Lonergan's proposal to refashion theological methodology. It starts with a move away from theory to interiority, to avoid a devolution of the mediating phase of religious meaning into a "necrology of data and facts."[39] Indeed, it can move deeper than interiority, says Lonergan, even "into the realm in which God is known and loved."[40] This dialectical procedure in religious studies self-critically engages "implicit and explicit assumptions that shape methodological enquiry." It is a kind of reflexivity that "pushes through mere being a self to taking possession of the self merely being."[41] It asks, "How are my normative assumptions and presuppositions shaping my research?" "Blocking my access to the objects of religious studies?" Then it proceeds with research using accepted methods of objective procedure. "'Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity,'" says Lonergan.[42] McCutcheon's "thinking about

38. Cooey, "The Place of Academic Theology," 174.
39. Jim Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus of Enecstatic Philosophy of Religion: Dialectic and Foundations* (SUNY: forthcoming), 4.
40. Kanaris, *The normative Impetus*, 4; citing Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 83–84.
41. Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 5.
42. Quoted in Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 11.

religion" was moved forward by Ivan Strenski's alternative of "thinking with religion," but both are still about or with an *object*.[43] Kanaris seeks to move beyond "object-constitutive" tasks to "subject-constitutive" tasks.[44]

Kanaris offers "a subject-constitutive discourse designed for the current critical platform of representation."[45] Poststructuralist critique destabilizes the language of subjectivity as a construction of "the modern ideals of autonomy and disembodied consciousness."[46] To rescue subjectivity, Kanaris ironically utilizes Heidegger's treatment of "being," where all being stands *out from* (*ek-stasis*) being collectively in a way that undermines the subject. Kanaris coins a term, *Enecstasis*, which adds "in" (*en*) to emphasize an element already present in Heidegger's "care of self": the subjective self, standing in as a subject even as it stands out from collective being. This forms a foundation for the subjective and objective aspects of studying religion. It is something we are engaged *in* subjectively, as we acknowledge our engagement in meaning construction; and as we are aware of this self-critically, we can simultaneously stand *out* for objective viewpoints. Roberts does not develop his own philosophical approach to deal with the poststructuralist "death of the subject," but instead adopts positions put forward by scholars such as Robert Orsi and Michael Jackson.[47] Humans are intersubjective, both profoundly shaped by social

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43. Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 11.
44. Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus,* 9.
45. Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 12.
46. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 103; cited in Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 11.
47. See, for example: Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Michael Jackson, *Methodology and History in Anthropology*, vol. 11, Existential Anthropology (New York: Berghahn, 2005), especially the introduction.

discourses and improvising as subjects within them.[48] Kanaris explicitly differentiates his subject-constitutive *enecstatic* approach from Roberts' similar object-constitutive approach. He sees Roberts as opening the way for theology to move from being an object of study to being resources *for* the study of religion.[49] However, this is still object-constitutive. It becomes subject-constitutive when a move is made towards "explicit preoccupation with self-making."[50] *Enecstasis* recognizes that in the choice between two objects of value (two alternative mediating viewpoints), one's own subjective foundations and values are revealed. "How do such ideas implicate me? Why do they resonate (or not) with me? Do I need a change of heart, a change of mind, a moral compass?"[51] It withdraws from the object to the self, and self-critically returns to the object seeking greater objectivity even as self-construction occurs in relation to the object.

However, there is evidence of a move in practice by Roberts towards a subject-constitutive *enecstasis.* We see self-conscious engagement as Roberts studies Rowan Williams' theology and finds himself personally moved at the representations of insight, beauty, and humanity, even in Williams himself – one subject influencing another.[52] Roberts is revealing when he says, "Whatever else they are, religions have and continue to provide a context in which human beings experiment with their subjectivity and intersubjectivity, engaging in forms of reflection and practice about

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48. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 104.
49. Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 16. See also: Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 20.
50. Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 18.
51. Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 19.
52. Kanaris, *The Normative Impetus*, 16–17.

what does and what should matter to them."[53] In the process, "one's life and one's connection with others is expanded and vivified."[54] This sounds like an expression of "self-making" that is usually implicit in Roberts, one that matches Kanaris' explicit preoccupation.

Religious Studies in Dialogue with Theology

With this initial review of Roberts' approach to religious studies and Kanaris' *enecstatic* framework in mind, we will now explore Roberts' substantive engagement with theology in his 2018 article "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness Between Philosophy and Religion." A central question for Roberts will be, "Does religious 'attachment' necessarily compromise critical thinking, or is it possible to think critically with and through one's attachments, religious or otherwise?"[55] A central theological objective for my purposes will be, as Rowan Williams says, to "better learn from this how to speak to others without assuming their refusal."[56] The two will prove to be related.

Roberts refers to David Wood's description of philosophy after Heidegger, who reveals the role of the concept. On the one hand, conceptual systematization frees us from the obscurity of mystifying disorder and deferral of meaning; on the other hand, conceptual stability encloses us in the obscurity of over-ordering and premature closure to the other. A boundary space of liminality exists between these two conceptual tendencies.[57] In other words,

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53. Roberts, *Encountering Religion,* 117–118.
54. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 118.
55. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 194.
56. Cited in Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 189.
57. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 190–191.

between rigid ideology construction on the one hand, and endless critical deconstruction on the other, is "a practice by which we discern and give ourselves to, with attention, intelligence, and care, what is beautiful, worthy, and meaningful – even divine or sacred."[58]

One such conceptual boundary exists between the critical study of religion and religion as the object of study. Critical thinking about religion (1) self-reflexively disengages; (2) critiques the limits of concepts; (3) and exposes the role of power and desire in constructing concepts using "historical, psychological, sociological, and linguistic methods."[59] In Nietzschean fashion, this presupposes the superiority of "autonomous preference formation" over heteronomous concepts given to a subject from outside themselves, and thus is often rooted in and results in the repudiation of religion – a presupposition crying out for critique.[60] Roberts introduces a fourth form of critical thinking, purportedly to be abstained from in objective critique: evaluation. This moves from critical detachment to (*enecstatic*) critical engagement and construction.

A crucial question from Roberts is whether theology can appeal to revelation without a conversation-ending appeal to heteronomy. "Is there a way of thinking – and do we want to still call it critical? – between 'autonomous preference formation' and the heteronomy of imposed and unreflective attachments?"[61] This form of theology would think self-reflexively from within a place

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58. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 190.
59. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 192.
60. Michael Warner, "Uncritical Reading," in *Polemic*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York: Routledge, 2004), 18; cited in Tyler T. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 193.
61. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 195.

of religious attachment, nuancing evaluative judgements based on revelation by maintaining a simultaneous openness that invites critical dialogue. It would disrupt the autonomy/heteronomy binary. Roberts looks to philosophers Martha Nussbaum and Stanley Cavell for ways of doing an engaged philosophy of living and thinking that he calls critical responsiveness – "the view that we always think and critique as participants in particular social formations and histories and as enmeshed in the natural world."[62] Objects are approached not from critical detachment but openness of the self in trust to other selves and objects so that a response can be generated by them. In critical responsiveness, a greater understanding of self and others can emerge, not limited just to foundationalist means of knowing available to the critical spectator. As these secular philosophers give themselves to the interstices of art or poetry with philosophy, they find themselves "brought up against the limits of autonomy," invited to response with signs like "grace," "mystery," "gratitude," "praise," and "God," and freed to expand their categories in fuller "connections with each other and the world."[63]

Roberts explores, not only theologian Rowan Williams' concept of criticism as responsiveness, but also his way of speaking which invites responsiveness in others. This theological intonation is speaking "'in a way which allows of answers,'" that does not "'seek to prescribe the tone, the direction, or even the vocabulary of a response,'" says Williams.[64] Rather than making pronouncements based on final truths that end conversation, Williams reveals his "fundamental axioms" around which critical and enlivening questioning revolves – a disclosure Tweed similarly

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62. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 197.
63. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 199.
64. Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 5; cited in Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 200.

calls for from all participants.[65] These axioms, such as "the scandal of the cross" or "sacrifice," are fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, but they are deployed in a fundamentally different manner. They are first deployed to disrupt, destabilize, and dispossess as finite the one who would be open to engaging. Only then do they have value as a new frame of reference and a practice of reverence – a new self emerges before a reality that one struggles to even put in language or concepts.[66] The axioms may be similar to those utilized by pulpit- pounders or pontificators, but the approach is quite dissimilar. William's axioms are presented humbly, not with assumed value as revelation but with value revealed by "the way they can illuminate particular, concrete phenomena in the context of social interaction, and thus further connection, conversation, reflection, and action."[67] Other explanations of these same socially experienced phenomena, relying on different fundamental axioms (socio-historical or otherwise), can be reflected upon and discussed as well, as no contributor resorts to totalizing strategies. We might presume that insights, both destabilizing and framing, can be appropriated even by participants who do not hold the same fundamental axioms.

This way of speaking arises from a finite way of being in contemplation. In contemplation of God as infinite, a self's aggrandizement is revealed, its complicity in damage to other selves, and its inadequacy – while yet being loved by God. In returning from contemplation, a finite inability to fully capture this God in concepts or language keeps a theologian aware of "the humanness of their discourse" and from speaking for God in a

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65. Tweed, "Valuing the Study of Religion," 298.
66. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 201.
67. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 200.

totalizing manner. Wonder induces worship and a reverent questioning that is open to other discourses.[68] Williams, using a phrase from Ricoeur, identifies this way of being and speaking as "non-heteronomous dependence."[69] Dogma and revelation provide a source outside the self for fueling questioning and reorientation that leads not away from critical thinking but towards it, resulting in creativity.

I note that Williams may be downplaying aspects of theology that could be labelled heteronomous. As Roberts notes, the fundamental Christian axioms he is committed to have "less to do with definitive propositions about God […] than with a process of questioning."[70] Moreover, for Williams "the language of sin has much *more to do with* […] our own complicity in forms of oppression […] than a moralizing attack on worldly joy or pleasure,"[71] and, finally, in his work, "Revelation is addressed *not so much* to a will called upon to submit as to an imagination called upon to 'open itself.'"[72] Minimizing heteronomous elements, such as Jesus' "not my will but your will" or of dogmatic statements, is to minimize the centrality of such content in the sources. Williams misses a more productive philosophical opportunity: the dialectical nature of heteronomy and autonomy. Roberts, however, seems to see such an opportunity.[73] St. Irenaeus expressed this paradox of

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68. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 200–203.
69. Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. L.S. Mudge (London: SPCK, 1981), 102; cited in Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 204.
70. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 201.
71. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 203.
72. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 204. See also: Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 146–147.
73. See Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 206; He makes this point more explicit in Roberts, "From Secular Criticism," 702.

freedom well: "the more expansive operation of our liberty implies that a more complete subjection and affection towards our Liberator had been implanted within us."[74] Thus we can ponder how dogmatic axioms might open up productive areas of thinking, how pleasure sometimes exists in an inverse relationship with fulfillment, and how revelation and creativity can grow in exponential relationship. Dialectical questions, properly intonated, could spark creative dialogue around a wide range of cultural concepts and phenomena connected with autonomy and heteronomy.

Roberts then moves on to philosopher William Desmond and critical reverence. Reverence "is the fundamental religious […] disposition; […] a receptiveness or attunement to the givenness of being."[75] It is functioning at the borderland that Woods identified between conceptual stability and chaos, where concepts give way to an excess of being – to mystery. Questioning and criticism can begin from wonder in a different way than they begin in skeptical doubt. Realizing the givenness of being and the wonder of being leads to an approach "that renounces controlling and manipulative efforts to unilaterally and finally determine the other – whether God, world, or other persons."[76] Reverence guides when to use concepts and when to recognize that concepts are inadequate for expressing an "other." Dependence of being releases a response of love for God and a way to question and understand all other loves. It is thus a wisdom of engaged love rather than detached criticism.

Roberts insists we "have to look beyond the modern, but by now well-worn idea that where philosophy and other forms of

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74. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies: The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), bk. 4.13.3.
75. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 205.
76. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 206.

modern thought are critical, religious thought, based as it is on faith and reverence, is not."[77] In contrast Roberts emphasises that "philosophers will think critically and expansively enough *about* religion only when they also learn to think *with* religion."[78] He is ever so close to the position of Kanaris, who might say that we are all already thinking *in* and *out of* the object of religion as subjects to begin with.

Theological Intonation

Roberts' "encounter and response" approach clears the way for religious studies scholars to have "humanistic encounters with religious texts and theology."[79] The remainder of this article will seek to reverse that direction by utilizing Roberts' insights to clear the way for confessional theologians to approach religious studies with a theological intonation that lends itself to "productive cross-disciplinary conversation."[80]

Jonathan Tran, in his review of Roberts' 2013 book, *Encountering Religion*, notes two reactions a confessional theologian like himself might have. The first he felt was gratefulness ("perhaps even a tad vindicated") that someone in religious studies felt Christian theology had something worthwhile to share. The second was a wariness he thought others might feel that Roberts' approach was a Trojan horse designed to secularize

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77. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 190; contra Donald Wiebe, *The Irony of Theology and the Nature of Religious Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 213ff.
78. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 207.
79. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 17.
80. Tweed, "Valuing the Study of Religion," 300.

theology.[81] It certainly could be seen that way: some of the examples of theologians and philosophers presented indeed seem to dilute the strength of revelation and dogmatics down to a level acceptable to postmodern culture and religious studies departments (e.g. Williams' words about "the humanness of [theological] discourse" or theology as "minor discourse"). Instead, I see Roberts' approach as a way to open communication with potential partners who have been pre-programmed to discount theological discourse.

Roberts seems to have cut his scholarly teeth dealing with one of postmodernism's architects, Nietzsche, and in reinterpreting his anti-Christian rhetoric in a way that opens his line of thinking to Christian insights.[82] It does not sound promising at first, as Roberts summarizes Nietzsche's position: "To live life to the fullest, instead of the living death of the [self-denying Christian] ascetic ideal, one must resist the bewitching calls of Truth or God."[83] Christian asceticism defers fulfillment of desire to a heavenly future, leaving people susceptible to earthly control by religion, to a "slave mentality." People are part of "the herd" and made average by the hegemony of religion that deprives the strong of their power and takes it for itself.[84] The popularity today of ideology critique and the suspicion of heteronomy derive in large part from Nietzsche.[85] But

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81. Jonathan Tran, "Review: Encountering Religion: Responsibility and Criticism after Secularism, by Tyler T. Roberts," *Modern Theology* 32, no. 4 (October 2016): 669–671.

82. Tyler T. Roberts, "'This Art of Transfiguration is Philosophy': Nietzsche's Asceticism," *The Journal of Religion* 76, no. 3 (July 1996): 402–427; cf. Tyler T. Roberts, *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

83. Roberts, "Nietzsche's Asceticism," 426.

84. Roberts, "Nietzsche's Asceticism," 423; cf. Roberts, *Encountering Religion,* 19.

85. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 19–20.

Roberts makes a controversial reinterpretation, arguing that Nietzsche was pursuing this-worldly asceticism in a classical spiritual quest, designed to arrive at self-mastery and realization of the will to power.[86]

Using the insights gained, Roberts delivers Christian asceticism from the portrait drawn by Nietzsche and develops theology along lines that those schooled by Nietzsche may find compelling. In "Theology and the Ascetic Imperative: Narrative and Renunciation in Taylor and Hauerwas" (1993), Roberts illustrates some principles for theology from Geoffrey Harpham's treatment of aesthetic spiritual quest narratives.[87] They are "discourses of temptation" featuring both elements of closure (a confessional tendency) and aspects that resist closure (a postmodern tendency). The nature of desire itself is complicated by Harpham. Desire resisted becomes desire heightened as it is deferred and displaced to a greater desire for God – not in the extinction of power but in an intensification of life and spiritual power.[88] We can see Roberts weaving a path between Nietzsche's (and Freud's) stark alternatives of autonomy/satisfaction or heteronomy/repression:

> Harpham rejects strong contrasts between the anarchic and playful forces of desire, often equated with liberation, and the repressive forces of truth, propriety, and order. Instead, his theory of asceticism envisages a mutual resistance between the desire for coherent, trans-

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86. Christopher Strathman, "Review: Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion by Tyler T Roberts," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 128; cf. Roberts, *Contesting Spirit*, 406, 425, 427.

87. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative* (Chicago, IL: University of California Press, 1987).

88. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 190.

cendent meaning, on the one hand, and the deconstructive license of the desire for free-play and infinite plurality, on the other.[89]

This issues in three tensions between openness and closure for theology in (1) how to be spiritually, (2) how to read Scripture, and (3) how to talk about God.

Spirituality is humble and powerful. At the moment an ascetic becomes aware of progress towards perfection, a simultaneous awareness of pride at transgressing upon God's perfection occurs. This leads to a re-examination of the self, revealing ever deeper temptations. It is here, at the intersection of perfection and transgression, that spiritual power is found and life heightened.[90] Roberts is presenting theology as "spiritual discipline"[91] – an ancient prerequisite that the academy is often quick to dispense with.[92]

In reading Scripture, elements of closure must not be allowed to erase elements of discontinuity. While the Scriptures say there is one God, there is no single narrative of who God is because he goes beyond any narrative,[93] so the theologian must not highlight one strand of the narratives and forget others. Referring to the differences in the four Gospels, he says, "Even the story of Jesus has never been a single story."[94] By reading it as an ascetic narrative with elements of closure and elements that resist closure, the tendency to make it a master narrative is reduced. Here, multiple perspectives are allowed, and there is an acknowledgement of the

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89. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 190.
90. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 195.
91. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 196.
92. E.g., Davaney, "Rethinking Theology," 151.
93. Cf. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 132.
94. Roberts, "Nietzsche's Asceticism," 194.

humanness of the words that the theologian believes are yet God's words. *When narrative closure has been overemphasized, the openness for human response is minimized* because it is in the deferral of closure and the struggle with discontinuity, in faith and doubt, that human response occurs.[95] On the other hand, the narrative is not to be relativized by denying the elements of closure that are present.

As for theological speech, Roberts begins his article with the question, "What can today's theologians still learn from Barth about speaking of God?"[96] Barth had spoken about a simultaneous theological imperative and inability to speak of God. Theology makes statements about God that it must also resist as inherently finite statements about the infinite. Insofar as theology works within this tension, it is an ascetic discipline.[97] Roberts asks, "Even if the ascetic imperative helps one avoid the extremes of anarchic fragmentation and oppressive closure, does the imperative to resist result in a paralyzing inability to make any real affirmations or negations?"[98] True to his program, Roberts resists a closed answer: "Perhaps theology is not a discipline which strives to fill God's absence with knowledge of God as God is in Godself, but rather an ascetic discipline that seeks to sustain and enliven the human desire for God."[99] As such, it is a form of worship.[100]

I find this article particularly germane to the question of theological intonation since it is early Roberts, perhaps when he spoke from a personal place closer to Christian theology than the

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95. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 194.
96. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 181.
97. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 182.
98. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 195.
99. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 197.
100. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 196.

later Roberts. His words are directed to theologians rather than his other work which is directed to religious studies about theologians. The theologian he describes is certainly the voice of the insider, the worshipper. It is certainly a theologian who lives and breathes from the Scriptural narrative(s). And it is certainly a theologian who is humbled by God's ineffability. To the question, "What is his name?" this God says, "I am who I am"; a name revealed in "the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" who "is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ex. 3:13, Ex. 3:14, Eph. 3:19-20 NRSV). Discontinuity, resistance to closure, humility, finitude, William's stammering speech – are all fitting here. Univocal language fails, and apophatic speech alone is entirely true, but not all bridges to comprehension are lost. With Thomas Aquinas, we must add to Roberts' presentation the language of analogy; that in our givenness of being, fragmentary elements of continuity can be signified between the given and the Giver.[101]

The core insider presupposition is that these are not just human words about God but ultimately God's words about himself to humanity – words given to communicate something. These words are signs of *différance*, to use Derrida's term; of difference from any one sign and the deferral of closure of meaning by reference to an endless string of related yet still inadequate signs. Yet, they give much more than ambiguity; they are a thousand redirections in a trajectory to the infinite, pointing one in a direction. Maybe not a map,[102] but certainly a compass (Gen. 12:1). Nor do these signs direct people to an infinite thing (a philosophical preoccupation),

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101. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd ed. (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1920), bk. 1.13.5–6, http://www.newadvent.org/summa.
102. Cf. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*.

but to a series of relationships centred on a singular relationship with God (a spiritual quest). This personal task is one for which words are more adequate. Like words about being in love (it's like being on fire but peaceful; you like them so much they drive you crazy; it's perfect but flawed), they are a series of opposites that progressively redirects one to a circumference of meaning that is recognizable once one enters it relationally. Perhaps this is what Roberts meant when he said theology's purpose was to "sustain and enliven the human desire for God."[103] Words are not to be worshipped or relativized but responded to in some way. That is a point of tension that a confessional theologian can embrace.

Theological speech about revelation must be steeped in humility, for then it is human words about divine analogues, and it needs to know the difference. Its most natural pairing is with spiritual being, as Roberts ventures, for thinking is not the only response engendered by revelation. It is not an overpowering master narrative but rather one that crescendos in the strangest mixture of discontinuity, doubt, and failure along with love, hope, and power. Preservation of indefiniteness within coherence gives the space for human becoming, struggling, thinking, and experimenting. It is a space that Roberts thinks can be entered by outsiders, at least provisionally, and is likely to leave them productively disoriented.

Summary of Theological Intonation

If "totalizing appeals to transcendent authority" close conversations, then the goal is to open them.[104] As Williams said, it is speaking "in a way which allows of answers," that does not "seek

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103. Roberts, "Theology and the Ascetic," 197.
104. Roberts, "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism," 372–375.

to prescribe the tone, the direction, or even the vocabulary of a response."[105] Yet confessional theologians must speak with a theological intonation that is simultaneously faithful to their presuppositions and opens a dialogue with those holding different presuppositions. Such dialogue is necessary for better apprehensionof the object of religion and of ourselves as subjects in relation to it. As per the presidential call from Tweed, the following summary offers ways of being, speaking, and listening for confessional theologians wishing to productively converse with religious studies:

1. *Have an attitude of receptive humility.* Reverence and a sense of dependence of being releases a response of love for God and a way to question and understand all other loves. It is a "vulnerable receptivity."[106] With Augustine, we must admit our limitations and fallibility, and in that posture come to conversations equally ready to receive as to give.[107] Lean in to listen with uncrossed arms.

2. *Engage in the larger cultural critique to illuminate its theological dimensions.* Because "theological terms, tropes, and concepts continue to shape modern and postmodern ethical and political discourses," there is common ground for theological insight into culture.[108] But if de Vries is right, then the insights will end up being far more than cultural: "every discourse, even the most secular, profane, negative, or nihilistic of utterances, directs and redirects itself

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105. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 200.
106. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 135.
107. Tweed, "Valuing the Study of Religion," 298.
108. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 165.

unintentionally and unwittingly toward the alterity for which—historically, systematically, conceptually, and figuratively speaking—'god' is, perhaps and so far, the most proper name?"[109]

3. *Utilize enecstatic self-reflexive criticism.* Kanaris offers a way to be simultaneously aware of our own religiously engaged subjectivity and use critical self-reflexivity to look for points of objective analysis, using the occasion as an opportunity for self-construction. From this position, we can attempt entry into other's frames of reference. We invite outsiders to do the same with us, as, for example, Romand Coles used John Howard Yoder and Williams to reimagine his radical democracy, in a way that bridged insider/outsider distinctions.[110] *Enecstasis* describes a place where the recognition of spiritual being, even confessional, is not a barrier to critical objectivity but a necessary pre-cognition.

4. *Reveal fundamental axioms in their destabilizing revealability.* Be overt in confessionalism, admitting that both your questioning and things you hold as beyond questioning revolve around the axiom of divine revelation in Christ. But in wider discourses where that preposition is not shared, revelation will be granted validity only indirectly as it is applied in revelatory ways to "concrete phenomena in the context of social interaction."[111] The

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109. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 153.
110. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 139.
111. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 200.

axiomatic statement that has been accepted by you with a period must be presented to those who do not accept it with a question mark that invites thinking. Revelation "works" as it reveals and destabilizes existing frames of reference and illuminates productive space for new ones.

5. *Complicate explanations* by acknowledging degrees of historical and social factors in approaching religious texts, authority, and the creation of religion. The church "must open itself to the judgement of the world and make such judgement an integral part of the process by which it finds its identity."[112] In turn, complicate materialistic judgements with explanations of religion that make sense not just from motivations of power but love, trust, and altruism.[113] Show elements of incongruity that persist in resisting materialist reductionism.

6. *Demonstrate the dialectic nature of heteronomy and autonomy.* Nietzsche's critique of heteronomy can be met by demonstrating its paradoxical relationship with autonomy as Irenaeus described it. Dogma and submission can provide a source outside the self for fueling reorientation that leads not away from life's power and experimental thinking but towards them.[114]

7. *Allow Scriptural narratives to be discoverable in the tension between closure and discontinuity.* As Roberts demonstrates

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112. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 137.
113. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 206.
114. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 200–203, 206; cf. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 169.

in "Theology and the Ascetic Imperative," the incongruous elements in Scriptural narratives defer closure, creating space for doubt and faith to struggle, leading to places of reflection for both insiders and outsiders. Heidegger engaged Paul as the best way to get at the facticity of the unrest of human life.[115] Derrida gained insight from discovering the discontinuities of gift in Matthew.[116] The passion and resurrection narratives involved both worship and doubt.

8. *Deploy apophatic and analogical language aware of both their limits and potential.* Theology attempts to speak about "that which slips away," as Taylor says.[117] In dealing with the sign "God," theology developed tools for dealing with a singularity that goes beyond the bounds of language and exposes the incompleteness of any discourse.[118] I extend Roberts' approach with the help of Aquinas to include not just apophatic language but also analogical. These signs provide direction to a space of personal encounter with the God who meets us incarnationally.

9. *Balance conceptual chaos and stability to create liminality.* Here, concepts give way to an excess of being – to mystery.[119] Reverence guides when to use concepts and when to recognize that concepts are inadequate for

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115. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 155–158.
116. Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 161–162.
117. Mark C. Taylor, *About Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1; cited in Roberts, *Encountering Religion*, 3.
118. Roberts, "Exposure and Explanation," 161–162.
119. Roberts, "Reverence as Critical Responsiveness," 206.

expressing an "other," thus preventing premature closure. It helps to make the distinction between what is divinely received and what is merely speculation open to preferences. Clear ethical commands and theological axioms can be seen as boundary markers of liminal space – holding it open. Tweed notes that coherence and complexity are values that overlap in religious studies and theology.[120] Thus, liminal conceptuality becomes a theological gift to a field and culture that might help it move on from endless deconstruction towards seminal construction.

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120. Tweed, "Valuing the Study of Religion," 302.

From Jewish King to Islamic Prophet: Interreligious Conversations about Solomon in Antique Jewish and Islamic Literature

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The mere mention of the figure of Solomon from the Hebrew Bible brings instantaneous recognition of his role as the king of Israel.[1] However, for those who study later renditions of Judaism in the Common Era, late Christian Antiquity, and Islam, the depiction of this revered monarch is noticeably different. Although Solomon is traditionally revered for building the Jerusalem temple and his unmatched wisdom,[2] an examination

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1. While the pivotal role played by Solomon is referenced in numerous works relating to the history of Ancient Israel, little has been done detailing the characteristics and roles of Solomon's singularly. Although there does appear to be a *vacat* in the scholarship, some recent scholarly works have sought to investigate the figure of Solomon. See Joseph Verheyden, ed., *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions: King, Sage, and Architect* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Pablo A. Torijano, *Solomon, the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (Luxembourg: De Boeck, 2002); S. Wälchli, *Der Weise König Salomo. Eine Studie zu den Erzählungen von der Weisheit Salomos in ihrem alttestamentlichen und altorientalischen Kontext*, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 151 (Stuttgart: Stuttgart, 1999).

2. See: Roddy Braun, "Solomon, the Chosen Temple Builder: The Significance of 1 Chronicles 22, 28, and 29 for the Theology of Chronicles," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1976): 581–590; R. Y. B. Scott, "Solomon

of Solomon in the Islamic sources[3] reveals an additional reverence for his position as a prophet. By employing K. Lawson Younger Jr.'s methodology of textual comparison,[4] this paper will explore the Islamic texts and traditions that refer to Solomon as a prophet and examine his characteristics and life as portrayed within them. These sources include the Qur'an, various *hadith*[5] collections, and the Persian historian Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari's historical chronicle entitled *History of Prophets and Kings* (1991).[6]

Central to this examination is the understanding of the bipartite distinction of *nabi* or *rasul*[7] as it relates to the prophetic position in Islamic tradition. Understanding this distinction in

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and the Beginnings of Wisdom in Israel," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Martin Noth and David Winton Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 262–279.

3. Like other subjects relating to Solomon that have been mentioned above, the role of Solomon in Islamic sources is an understudied topic. See Jules Janssens, "The Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā on King-Prophet Solomon," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions: King, Sage, and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 241–253.

4. K. Lawson Younger, Jr., "The 'Contextual Method': Some West Semitic Reflections," in *The Context of Scripture, vol. 3 Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), xxxiii–xlii.

5. *Hadiths* are generally defined as a collection of traditions containing the sayings and actions (daily practices) of the prophet Muhammad.

6. Commonly known as *Tarikh al-Tabari* or *The History of al-Tabari*, this retelling of history is recognized as being the most important and authoritative "world" history produced within the Islamic world. It is a detailed chronicle about ancient nations (with special focus on biblical people and prophets), legends and events from the history of ancient Iran, and early Islamic history (from Muhammad to approximately 915 CE). See William M. Brinner, ed. and trans., *The History of al-Tabarī, vol. 3 The Children of Israel* (New York: SUNY, 1991), 152–178.

7. Both these terms, *nabi* and *rasul* are generally translated as prophet, however, I will be offering a more detailed definition of each of these terms later in the paper.

Islam, as well as similar distinctions that are made in the characteristics of Solomon in later Jewish traditions, provides an instructive system by which to measure Solomon as a prophet. Ultimately, this paper will propose that the preservation of the tradition designating Solomon as a prophet in the Islamic sources may be an accurate depiction of him as presented in earlier traditions preserved within Jewish texts outside of the Hebrew Bible.

Ancient 'Canonicity,' Younger's Laws of Propinquity, and the Historicity of Islamic Solomon Traditions

In recent years, scholars have questioned traditional assumptions concerning canonicity in the ancient religious world.[8] While scholarship has long perpetuated a parallel between modern canonical scripture with the antique canons of Judaism and Christianity, the manuscript evidence from the Judaean Desert has altered that perception to suggest that some texts commonly relegated to the position of apocryphal, pseudepigraphical, or non-biblical were authoritative among Jewish and Christian communities in antiquity. Because of this broadening perspective, scholars elect to use the phrase "authoritative texts" rather than "canon" to discuss possible documents that served as foundational

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8. See Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford, 2016); Shemaryahu Talmon, *Text and Canon of the Hebrew Bible: Collected Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010); H. Daniel Zacharias and Craig A. Evans, eds., *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, eds., *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

or authoritative in these various faith communities.[9] In a recent work, Mladen Popović concludes, "some non-biblical texts were apparently as authoritative as the biblical texts, even though they did not end up in the Jewish or Christian canons."[10] It is with this expansive view of authoritative texts in Judaism that the appearances of extra-canonical texts and traditions concerning Solomon can be related and assessed within the Islamic sources.

Addressing the "parallelomania" that gripped biblical scholarship in the twentieth century and the equally responsive "parallelophobia" that followed, Younger developed a four-pronged approach to assessing the parallels between two disparate ancient texts and traditions. Younger's four primary elements of assessment rely upon clear and distinct connections between two or more ancient texts in the areas of language, geography, chronology, and culture, which he terms the laws of propinquity.[11] At a basic level, Younger's methodology emphasizes that when assessing the parallels between two ancient texts, the greater the number of these four criteria that are met with high probability, the stronger the evidence that one text is reliant and connected to the other.[12] This methodology is especially helpful for evaluating how the prophetic traditions concerning Solomon in Islam may be connected with ancient Jewish extra-canonical traditions that share the same perspective.

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9. George J. Brooke, "'The Canon within the Canon' at Qumran and in the New Testament," in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, JSPSup 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 244–250.

10. Mladen Popovic, *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1.

11. Younger, "The Contextual Method," xxxix.

12. Younger, "The Contextual Method," xlii.

Undoubtedly, some traditions excluded from this analysis were likely orally transmitted or existed in manuscripts no longer available to us when the Islamic traditions were in their formative stages. To ensure that this study presents the firmest evidence of Jewish traditions that could have been available and utilized by antique Islamic authors, only Jewish and Islamic texts that meet all four of the criteria outlined by Younger will be included in this study. By exercising caution in this regard, it is my hope that the examples cited and discussed herein will be more of a certain character than those traditions that would fail to qualify under Younger's methodology.

To compare the extra-canonical texts and traditions of antique Judaism with the Islamic tradition, the four areas of emphasis proposed by Younger need to be applied to the Islamic traditions that preserve statements of Solomon as a prophet. As each Solomonic tradition is analysed below, the laws of propinquity will be applied to highlight the probability of contact between the antique Jewish sources and those of early Islam. While several intricate issues and questions concerning the Islamic traditions of *ḥadith*, and *tafsir*[13] – relating to conclusions about language, geography, chronology, and culture – will be noted when appropriate, the acceptable probability of current scholarly consensus will provide the primary basis for the analysis, while at the same time leaving enough room for possible changes in perception where the data is inconclusive.

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13. *Tafsir* is a form of Qur'anic exegesis, which attempts to clarify, explain, and interpret the Qur'an.

Solomon: *Nabi* or *Rasul*?
Jewish and Islamic Interaction in the Middle Ages

The influence of Judaism on Islam has become a budding topic of interest among some scholars in both fields of study. As Jacob Lassner has stated, "[a] salient characteristic of Muslim historiography was the manner in which the faithful fully appropriated the Jewish past as part of their own historical experience and world-view."[14] While each Islamic tradition or text discussed below will have a slightly different propinquity with the Jewish source from which it appears to be drawn, there are general points of contact between Judaism and Islam that contribute to this study and the connections scholars make between these two faith communities. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to present a detailed history of Jewish-Islamic relations in the Middle Ages,[15] analyzing the extent to which Judaism was present during the formation of various Islamic texts and traditions is worthwhile – one cannot truly divorce the rise of Islam from the life of Muhammad, and viewing the interactions between Muhammad and Jewish peoples is instructive.

Though Muhammad's interactions with Jews was not singularly political or theological in nature, F. E. Peters emphasizes that, "despite the great deal of information supplied by later Muslim literary sources, we know pitifully little for sure about the political

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14. Jacob Lassner, "Time, Historiography, and Historical Consciousness: The Dialectic of Jewish-Muslims Relations," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction*, ed. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astern (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 2.

15. For a detailed analysis and history of relations between Muslims and Jews, see Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora, eds., *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

or economic history of Muhammad's native city of Mecca or of the religious culture from which he came."[16] Montgomery Watt indicates that "there were Jews in Medina when Muhammad went there, but how they came to be there and whether they were of Hebrew stock is not clear."[17] Robert Hoyland inquires on this comment and posits:

> Should we think in terms of […] 'a genuine Hebrew stock' linked 'with the learned centres in the greater world outside of Arabia' […] or rather of a community mostly made up of Arab converts or refugees [that] substantially integrated within Arabian society and [were] barely in touch with non-Arabian Jewish communities, possessing a relatively low level of Jewish education?[18]

With this stark question in mind, and the lack of sources to answer it, Peters continues:

> The Qur'an is filled with biblical stories, for example, most of them told [are] told in an extremely elliptical or what has been called an allusive or referential style. For someone who had not read or heard the Bible recited many of these Quranic narratives would make little sense. But they did and we can only conclude that Muhamad's audiences were not hearing these stories for the first time.[19]

16. F. E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), 260.
17. W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 192.
18. Robert Hoyland, "The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur'an and in Their Inscriptions," in *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2011), 111.
19. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins*, 260.

Clearly the influences of Judaism are present in the worldview of Muhammad; what is less clear is the extent to which they were present. What can be concluded is that there was a Jewish community in Muhammad's social circles that may very well have been the source of some of the prophet's information on Jewish history.

After the death of Muhammad, interactions between Jews and the Islamic communities continued in a different way as the Muslim empire began to rise. During this period of Muslim conquest, Reuven Firestone notes, "Medinan Jews and early Muslims, like their descendants, shared many of the most fundamental notions of religion in prophecy, revelation, ethics, law, ritual, ritual purity, and theology […] [but] the Qur'an itself, places revelation into the context of previous revelations known in seventh century Arabia through Jewish and Christian scripture."[20]

The Jewish-Muslim relations that become vital to this analysis rise from the period between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, a period some have hypothetically labelled "the Golden Age" or *convivencia*.[21] It is during this period that a relative cohesion takes place in the Islamic empire that enables Jews to standardize their practices, beliefs, and theology.[22] Two Jewish

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20. Reuven Firestone, "Muslim-Jewish Relations," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, published January 4, 2016, https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-17.

21. While he does not agree entirely with the conceptualization of a "Golden Age" of existence, Mark Cohen has proposed that the situation within the Muslim world was much more favourable to Jews at this time than it was for Jews living in the Christian world. See Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 276–284.

22. Marina Rustow, "Jews and Muslims in the Eastern Islamic World," in *A*

academies, Sura and Pumbedita near present day Baghdad, were established during this period and existed for centuries. It is because of an ease of travel throughout the empire and a period of relative peace that these Jewish centres of learning, interpretation, and law became known throughout the world. While further genres of Jewish learning were developed during this time, it is the access and preservation of manuscripts and texts like the Talmud,[23] Aramaic Targumim, and the Hebrew Bible itself (in various translations) that enabled the Jews to thrive intellectually. There grew out of this period a controlled intellectual discourse of the Jewish world, a discourse that would have likely been standardized to a point of recognition to non-Jews.[24]

While this period was one of prosperity and intellectual growth for the Jews, even more could be said about the expanding Islamic empire. Though much has been said and more could be written concerning this ideal time, for our purposes the great outgrowth of this period was that of intellectual learning and textual construction regarding Islamic religion. Jane Dammen McAuliffe has emphasized the great progress that was made in the Islamic study of the Qur'an and in the Arabic language through these centuries as "the sciences of the Qur'an" rose to prominence.[25] Academies, similar to the ones established by the Jews, were

History of Jewish-Muslim Relations, ed. Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 75–98.

23. The Talmud is a compilation of ancient teachings (laws and traditions) regarded as sacred and normative by Jews.

24. Firestone, "Muslim-Jewish Relations."

25. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "An Introduction to Medieval Interpretation of the Qur'ān," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 311–319.

focused on lexicography, etymology, and the study of grammar and rhetoric within other ancient Arabic literature.[26] These academies sought to understand the use of words in a variety of contexts, to preserve oral as well as written traditions. This intellectual endeavour sought to acquire a clearer knowledge of God, and to do so through understanding his message as presented through his messengers, in both their textual and oral forms. To help clarify the Islamic position on prophecy, a recognition and perpetuation of a two-tiered definition of prophets was more fully developed with the aid of the intellectual advances mentioned above.

The first of two definitions for a prophet preserved in the Qur'anic text is the term *nabi*. A cognate with the Hebrew word, *nbi*, this type of prophet can be defined as:

> One who announces. A person called by God to communicate a divinely given message in the form of general moral teachings to humankind and the unseen world of spirits. [One who] expresses the communicative nature of prophethood, rather than the emissary function of delivering a message in specific language. The message is exemplified in the *nabi's* life.[27]

Especially when understanding the purview of the Islamic traditions concerning ancient prophets like Solomon, various points within the definition of a *nabi* will warrant highlighting below.

The second title employed to designate a prophet in the Qur'an is *rasul*, defined as:

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26. Gordonn Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia from Ancient Times to Their Eclipse under Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 97–100.
27. "Nabi," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1679.

> A messenger (of God). One of two Qur'anic terms to refer to Muhammad and other prophets. Usually translated as "prophet." Some scholars describe a *rasul* as a *nabi* who has delivered a written revelation (scripture), although the *Quran* appears to use the terms interchangeably. It describes a coherent chain of prophets and messengers (and scriptures associated with them) sent by God, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, David (the Psalms are considered his scripture), Solomon, Moses (who brought the *Torah*), Jesus (the Gospels are considered his scripture), and Muhammad (who brought the *Quran*). The *Quran* states (10:47) that a *rasul* has been sent to every spiritual community (*ummah*). All messengers call humanity to worship the one God and renounce evil.[28]

Some may note that while all prophets designated as a *rasul* can also be considered a *nabi*, not all prophets designated as a *nabi* can be considered a *rasul*. Recognizing the definitions of these two distinctive terms for prophet in Islamic literature will aid in an analysis of the Islamic and Jewish texts designating Solomon as a prophet. At the outset of our exploration of ancient Jewish and Islamic texts, it should be noted that even in the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, scholars struggle to conclusively categorize Solomon as a prophet with the title of *rasul*. While he is included in the proper prophetic circles, questions abound as to his appropriate status. While the primary objective of this paper is to identify the Jewish traditions and source texts that influenced Islamic traditions identifying Solomon as a prophet, an ancillary purpose is to validate claims that he indeed belongs with the prophets, both the *nabi* and the *rasul*.

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28. "Rasul," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1679.

Islamic Traditions of Solomon as a Prophet
and Their Jewish Sources

Having established the necessary foundation upon which this analysis of Solomonic prophetic traditions can proceed and be assessed, it is from the texts of both Islam and Judaism that the most productive insights are attained. In the following section, several Islamic traditions and texts that preserve and construct a memory of Solomon as a prophet will be presented chronologically as they appear in the Hebrew Bible. These texts will appear in an abbreviated form, though some material from their context will be drawn upon to solidify certain conclusions. Each Islamic text or tradition presenting Solomon as a prophet is paired with a Jewish text that appears to be the source from which the Islamic authors drew their material. Where appropriate, multiple sources will be cited. After presenting the textual data for the Solomonic prophetic characteristics presented in both the Jewish and Islamic traditions, Younger's laws of propinquity will be applied to solidify historical dependence, as is demonstrated by Table 1 below. As established above, a line of dependence between the posterior Islamic sources and the anterior Jewish sources existed in early Islam. It is important to note that the Islamic traditions presented below may not be derived from the exact Jewish sources presented. Nevertheless, the identification of the Jewish source as being available to an Islamic scholar in the Middle Ages who is likely associating with Arabian Jews will be a sufficient starting point for diagnosing an Islamic dependence on Jewish traditions designating Solomon as a prophet.

	Language	Geography	Chronology	Cultural
Qur'an[29]	Arabic	Mecca, Medina, Damascus, Basra, Kufa	650 CE	Arab, Islamic
Seder Olam Rabbah[30]	Aramaic	Babylonian Academies	200 CE	Jewish Rabbinic
Hebrew Bible (ca. 600 CE)	Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Aramaic	Wherever there are Jews	100 CE	Jewish Hellenistic
Mishnah	Hebrew, Aramaic	Babylon	200 CE	Jewish
Tafsir Ibn-Kathir[31]	Arabic	Syria	1300 CE	Islamic
Tg. Song of Songs	Aramaic	Babylonian	100 CE	Jewish
al-Tabari	Arabic	Iran	800 CE	Islamic

Table 1: A Diagram of Islamic and Jewish Textual Information Against Younger's Method of Comparison.

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29. James A. Bellamy, "Textual Criticism of the Koran," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 121 (2001): 1–6; Farid Esack, "Qur'an," in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 562–568.

30. Heinrich Walter Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), xi.

31. *Tafsir* Ibn Kathir is a classic commentary on the Qur'an written by Imad ud Din Ibn Kathir and dates to the fourteenth century CE. It is accepted as a summary of the earlier commentary by al-Tabari. It is also celebrated because it links various *hadiths* (sayings of Muhammad) and sayings of the *sahaba* (Muhammad's companions) to verses in the Qur'an.

Solomon in Prophetic Lists[32]

Qur'an 4.163[33]	Seder 'Olam 20[34]
Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the book [of Psalms].	(Here Solomon is listed among 48 Jewish Prophets) […] since Solomon died, he (Shishak) came and took the treasures of the Lord […][35]

The utilization of individuals from the Hebrew Bible occurs regularly within the Qur'an. As cited above, it is the consensus of scholars that Muhammad and those who engaged in the oral and textual transmission of the Qur'an during the seventh century CE could have been familiar with the primary religious text of Judaism. While a few examples of employment from the Hebrew Bible texts will be referenced below, the reference found here is of interest when analysing the Qur'an for dependence on a Jewish source.

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32. While several prophetic lists in both Jewish and Islamic sources exist, for the purposes of this study it will be sufficient to offer the few examples listed here.
33. "An-Nisa the Women 4:163," Quran.com, accessed April 17, 2021, https://quran.com/4.163.
34. "Seder Olam Rabbah 20," *Sefaria*, accessed April 17, 2021, http://www.sefaria.org/Seder_Olam_Rabbah.20?lang=en. My translation.
35. Baer Ratner provides notes suggesting that the taking up of the treasure of the Lord was a symbolic representation of receiving the status of a prophet. See Baer Ratner, *Mabo leha-Seder Olam Rabbah* (Wilna: Widow & Bros, 1894), 8.

The Seder 'Olam text is part of the Babylonian Talmud, a document that was produced around 200 CE by Jewish scholars near Babylon. The primary function of the text was to provide an interpretation of both the preserved text of the Hebrew Bible and the oral tradition that accompanied it, the Mishnah.[36] These texts were predominately written in Aramaic, a cognate language with Arabic.[37] These texts were primarily circulated in Jewish centres around Babylon and would have been present during the "Golden Age" of Jewish and Islamic relations. Based on Younger's methodology, it is probable that both Jewish and Islamic scholars would have had access to this text when the Qur'an was being transmitted.

The conceptualization of a prophet list is an important indicator of who is classified alongside Solomon in both the Jewish and Islamic traditions. While lists of prophets are rare prior to the Common Era, numerous other types of lists existed in antiquity.[38] A peculiar tradition of maintaining a prophet list is preserved in the Armenian tradition, where prophets from both Jewish and Islamic sources are utilized.[39]

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36. Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam,* xi.
37. Max Leopold Margolis, *A Manual of the Aramaic Language of the Babylonian Talmud* (London: David Mutt, 1910), 1.
38. The Sumerian Kings List is the best example of ancient lists. The Hebrew Bible primarily substitutes the kings list with genealogies (see Gen. 5), making the genealogies a break from the traditional recording of authority. See John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1989), 128.
39. Scott B. Noegel and Brannon M. Wheeler, eds., *The A to Z Prophets in Islam and Judaism* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 40.

David's Heir

Qur'an 27.16	1 Kings 2.12[40]
Solomon inherited from David [...] everything has come to us.	So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.
Ibn Kathir[41]	Mas. Sotah 48b[42]
Solomon Inherited prophethood and kingship, but not all of David's property because David had other sons.	Who are the former prophets? Rabbi Huna says, They are David, Samuel and Solomon [...]

Like the prophets list mentioned above, it appears that the emphasis on Solomon becoming a prophet is tied to heredity. It is worth noting that both the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible make clear that Solomon inherits his father's throne and kingdom. Even more interesting is the commentary that exists in both Islamic and Jewish traditions, which emphasizes that the inheritance from David was not just monarchical. Ibn Kathir, who wrote a *tafsir* in the fourteenth century (near the end of the "Golden Age" of Jewish and Islamic relations), may have had access to a Jewish tradition that formed in the Midrashim, or the Oral Torah.[43] Emerging from the ashes of the

40. The translation of the Hebrew Bible used in this paper is derived from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.
41. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran,* 266.
42. The Hebrew translations of the Talmud Texts are my own.
43. During the Second Temple Period, it was believed that an oral law that had not been written was transmitted from generation to generation along with the written Torah. This Midrash (textual interpretation) provided further information on the texts of the Hebrew Bible. These explanations were not considered like sacred scripture but were accepted as true. Following the

Second Temple, the Mishnaic texts provided further knowledge and understanding of the Torah. While the Mishnah commentary was written after the fall of the Second Temple, their traditions are dated as far back as the fifth century BCE. While preserved in Hebrew, the text is:

> A Hebrew that differs from the literary language as it is found in even the latest versions of the Hebrew Bible. Greek, Latin, and Aramaic influences are a consequence of the cultural influences with which the Jews had come in contact. Aramaic had entirely, or almost entirely, displaced Hebrew as the language of the Jews.[44]

Once written, these Mishnaic texts primarily circulated around Jewish centres in the vicinity of Babylon and would have been present and readily available in Aramaic,[45] and perhaps in Arabic translations or transliterations,[46] when Ibn Kathir was producing his *tafsir*. Based on Younger's methodology, it is probable that both Jewish and Islamic scholars would have had access to this text when the Qur'an was being transmitted.

In arguing for the purposes behind these texts in establishing Solomon as a prophet, it is instructive that Solomon is

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destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the rabbis believed that it was an appropriate time to record these oral sayings and traditions for the purpose of ensuring their survival. The *sotah* (a tractate – found at the beginning of the Talmud) text quoted here is among those early Midrashim.

44. Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1933), xxvii.

45. While it is uncertain whether authors like Ibn Kathir knew Aramaic, they appear to draw from sources that are only available in Aramaic today. This suggests that either there were translations of the text into other languages or the *tafsir* authors were familiar enough with the language to draw information from them. See Emran El-Badawi, *The Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

46. Danby, *The Mishnah*, xxix.

put in the same category as his father. While David is never referred to in the Hebrew Bible as a prophet, the Aramaic Targumim, the Qur'an, and veiled references in the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that he was revered as such even in the Second Temple period.[47]

Solomon as a Prophet-King

Ibn Kathir[48]	Tg. Song of Songs 1:1[49]
God gave Solomon what he wanted and allowed him to use it how he wanted. God allowed him to do what he wanted and he did not have to account for it to God. These are the circumstances of a prophet-king […] God made a division between succession to prophethood and kingship after the Prophet Muhammad […]	Songs and praises (from) Solomon the prophet-king of Israel spoke by the spirit of prophecy before the Lord of all the World.

The conceptualization of Solomon as not only a king, but a prophet-king, is emphasized by the *tafsir* of Ibn Kathir. Providing a lengthy commentary on the differences between a prophet-king and a prophet-servant,[50] Ibn Kathir juxtaposes Solomon's prophetic call with that of Muhammad, who was given the option to be a prophet-king, but in humility he turned it down.[51] While Younger's catego-

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47. See Peter Flint, "The Prophet David at Qumran," in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 158–167.
48. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 273.
49. "Aramaic Targum," *Sefaria*, accessed April 17, 2021, https://www.sefaria.org/Aramaic_Targum_to_Song_of_Songs.1?ven=Englis h_ Translation_by_Jay_Treat&lang=en.
50. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 273.
51. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 273.

ries for Ibn Kathir have already been addressed, the Aramaic Targumim have not. The Aramaic Targumim are primarily an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible. However, scholars have noted that the translators took certain liberties when translating text from Hebrew to Aramaic.

This created what some scholars have called "liberalism translation" and "Midrashic interpretation" of most of the Hebrew texts.[52] These texts were produced sometime after one hundred CE, following the destruction of the Second Temple, in Babylon. While the primary audience and culture was that of the Jews, for *tafsir* authors like Ibn Kathir, these sources would have been invaluable in reconstructing the records of the peoples of the Bible.

Between the *tafsir* of Ibn Kathir and the Targumim tradition, there appears to be an acceptance of an individual holding both the office of a prophet and king. Ibn Kathir points out that following Muhammad, no other prophet-king will reside on the earth until the end of the world.[53]

Solomon's Reception of Scripture

al-Tabari 577	Tg. Song of Songs 1:1[54]
The demons said to Solomon: "O Messenger of God! Do not be angry, because if there is anything to be known, the hoopoe knows it."	Songs and praises (from) Solomon the prophet-king of Israel spoke by the spirit of prophecy before the Lord of all the World.

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52. D. R. G. Beattie, "Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth," in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in Their Historical Context*, ed. Derek R. G. Beattie and Martin J. McNamara (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 342.
53. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 273.
54. "Aramaic Targum," *Sefaria,* accessed April 17, 2021, https://www.sefaria.org/Aramaic_Targum_to_Song_of_Songs.1?ven=English_Translation_by_Jay_Treat&lang=en.

While on the surface these two passages look to have little to do with each other and the reception of scripture, al-Tabari employs the recognizable title of *rasul* in the voice of demons to describe Solomon. Al-Tabari[55] wrote his history of the children of Israel in the late ninth or early tenth century CE in modern-day Iran near the thriving Jewish academies mentioned earlier. For al-Tabari, Solomon is not just a prophet, but a messenger of God, recognizing him as a bestower of scripture. While most of the texts that reference Solomon as a *rasul,* including the Qur'an, bestow upon him this title, they (and scholars studying them) fail to recognize what scriptural text Solomon provided. Speculation abounds in scholarship as to whether Solomon wrote Proverbs or Qohelet,[56] but in the Targum of Song of Songs, not only is Solomon designated as the author of the text, but the recipient of the text via revelation and prophecy from God. The exact definition of a *rasul* in Islamic tradition.

Solomon's Communication with Animal Life

Qur'an 27.16[57]	1 Kings 4.33
And Sulaiman (Solomon) inherited (the knowledge of) Dawud (David). He said: "O mankind! We have been taught the language of birds, and on us have been bestowed all things. This, verily, is an evident grace (from Allah)."	He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish.

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55. Brinner, *The History of al-Tabarī*, 152–178.
56. See Peter Enns, *Eccelesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 111.
57. "An-Naml the Ant 27.16," Quran.com, accessed April 17, 2021, https://quran.com/27.16.

Abu Malik[58]	Legends of the Jews[59]
Solomon was also able to understand the speech of other animals and other creatures.	Once the guest refused the gift (from Solomon), and asked the king to teach him the language of the birds and the animals instead.

Like Wheeler – who compiled various Islamic traditions, *hadith* and *tafsir*, in accessible volumes to aid students in their studies of Islamic exegesis – Louis Ginzberg compiled ancient Jewish traditions into accessible volumes and edited them into a progressing narrative from Genesis through the Hebrew Bible. While not the most direct source, Ginzberg's Jewish legends provides texts that are difficult to identify and locate. The traditions upon which Ginzberg relies are Mishnaic and follow the same *Sitz im Leben* as those cited above.

Like the tradition of Solomon being the complete heir of his father, the tradition of Solomon speaking with animals finds its depth, not in the Qur'an or Hebrew Bible parallels, but in the interpretations of those primary texts. Abu Malik, one of the sources Ibn Kathir draws upon for his *tafsir*, seems to have been aware of a Jewish tradition that appears in the Mishnaic sources. The fact that these sources speak of Solomon conversing with animals so extensively is a sure sign of intertextuality between the Islamic

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58. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 267.
59. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews, vol. 4 From Joshua to Esther* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1913), 138. Ginzberg references *Ben ha-Melek we-ha-Nazir* XXIV and Prym and Socin, *Der Dialeki des Tur Abdin*, LXVI as primary sources for this legend, although various other attestations to the legend exist.

world and Judaism.[60] For the authors, this secret knowledge is further evidence of Solomon's role as a *rasul* and a *nabi*.

Solomon's Signet Ring

al-Tabari 589	Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* VIII. 46–47[61]
He (Solomon) had a chief concubine named al-Āminah to whom, when he entered his privy or when he wished to have intercourse with one of his wives, he would give his signet ring until he purified himself, because he would not touch his signet ring unless he was pure. His dominion was in his signet […] he commanded the demons.	And he (Solomon) left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return, and his method of cure is of great force unto this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country […] releasing people that were demonical in the presence of Vespasian […] the manner of cure was this: He put a ring that had a foot of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon[62] through his nostrils […] making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed.

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60. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 4, 287–288. "The conception that he who knows the language of the animals must keep it secret at the peril of his life seems to be presupposed also in Arabic legends […] Solomon's knowledge of the languages of the animals plays an important part in the [Islamic] legends [of returning to the original language spoken in the Garden of Eden by the Snake]."
61. Ralph Marcus, trans., *Josephus Jewish Antiquities Books 7–8* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 154.
62. This tradition also appears in the Targum Sheni. See Bernard Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 115.

The most famous of all Solomonic traditions in Islam is that which is associated with Solomon's signet ring and the power that it possesses to control all that is around him. While al-Tabari includes a version of this tale in his *History of the Children of Israel*, it is of interest to note the similarities between Josephus' account of a contemporary Jew performing the same acts of Solomon, with his ring and wisdom. The ability to pass along an item to control external forces fits into the worldview introduced by the prophet lists discussed above, particularly the text of Seder 'Olam. Whether this account suggests that Josephus thought of Solomon as a *rasul* or *nabi* is debatable. Josephus wrote in Greek and primarily in the Levant, suggesting that this tradition extended from the end of the Second Temple Period to the ninth and tenth centuries CE. It is highly unlikely that the Josephus text was the source for al-Tabari, but it is evidence that the tradition existed at least a millennium before al-Tabari recorded it in his history.

Solomon's Reign and Death

Qur'an 34.14[63]	1 Kings 11.42–43
Then when We decreed death for him [Sulaiman], nothing informed them (jinns) of his death except a little worm of the earth, which kept (slowly) gnawing away at his stick, so when he fell down, the jinns saw clearly that if they had known the unseen, they would not have stayed in the humiliating torment.	The time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. Solomon slept with his ancestors and was buried in the city of his father David, and his son Rehoboam succeeded him.

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63. "Saba Sheba 34.14," Quran.com, accessed April 17, 2021, https://quran.com/34.14.

Ibn Kathir[64]	Legends of the Jews[65]
In the fourth year of his reign, Solomon started building Jerusalem. According to Zuhri he lived for 52 years, and his reign was 40 years. […] His son Rehoboam was king after him for seventeen years, and after him the kingdom of the Israelites split up.	At the youthful age of twelve, Solomon succeeded his father David as king.

The death of Solomon, like those prophets before him, proves nothing more than that he was mortal and susceptible to death. It is interesting to note that while both the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible record the death of Solomon, the outside traditions of Ibn Kathir and Mishnaic texts align in their assessment that Solomon ascended to the throne at twelve, reigned for forty years, and died at fifty-two. While some sources do hover around the twelve-year-old ascension mark,[66] the extra canonical traditions preserve a congruent timeline for the prophet and king of Israel.

Conclusion

As explained above, although Solomon is traditionally revered for building the Jerusalem temple and for his unmatched wisdom, an examination of this king of Israel in Islamic traditions

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64. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 279.
65. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews,* 125.
66. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews,* 125. Ginzberg relies on the work of Ratner and cites the Talmudic books of Seder 'Olam 14, Nazir 5a, Temurah 15a, and Sanhedrin 69b as evidence for his conclusion.

through the lens of Jewish source texts reveals an additional reverence for his position as a prophet. When employing the methodology of Younger's textual comparison, the Islamic texts and traditions that refer to Solomon as a prophet – including the Qur'an, various *ḥadith* collections, and the History of al-Tabarī – appear to be in harmony with extra-canonical Jewish traditions that could have been available to the Islamic authors. Central to this examination has been the bipartite distinctions of the prophetic position defined in Islamic tradition of *nabi* and *rasul.* Solomon, in both Jewish and Islamic sources, qualifies for both distinctions and the method employed provides an instructive system by which to measure other historical figures as prophets in both faith traditions. Ultimately, this paper suggests that the tradition that distinguishes Solomon as a prophet in the Islamic sources may be an accurate depiction of Solomon as presented in earlier traditions preserved within non-canonized Jewish texts as opposed to the Hebrew Bible which does not designate him as such.

Protective Magic on the Byzantine Periphery: The Development of Apotropaic Devices

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Anxiety about the safety of one's family, home and health is an age-old concern. I began writing this paper on Byzantine protective magic just as the COVID-19 pandemic broke out; an unseen and harmful force which has sparked a wide variety of (largely ineffective) protective strategies like essential oils, hot baths, garlic and echinacea. For my part, I know that drowning myself in unprecedented amounts of lemon-ginger tea will not keep me from getting sick, but it does make me feel better. In Late Antiquity and the early Byzantine period, one of the most immediate perceived threats to be protected against was demonic activity, a similarly invisible and malevolent force. However, the methods that people adopted to safeguard themselves against harm underwent huge temporal, regional and religious variations. Even within Christianized areas in the early Byzantine period, people tended to adopt a variety of different methods to safeguard themselves from demons. Why did the same desire have such diverse manifestations in different places?

My paper will trace the development of apotropaic (or protective) popular religious practices in areas where Christian ideas had only recently been introduced into pre-existing ritual efficacy frameworks. Examples will be drawn from Mesopotamia and Egypt in the fourth to seventh centuries CE. I argue that new Christian ideas and Graeco-Roman magical forms did not replace

existing indigenous belief systems surrounding protective practices. Christian ideas needed to operate within indigenous magical dialects and ideas about how magic "worked"; the structure of magic and ideas about efficacy remained with only a thin veneer of Christianity applied to the exterior.[1] I propose that this phenomenon may be explained, in part, through the use of ritual theory. Ultimately, pre-existing ideas about ritual efficacy were much more resilient than the names of forces invoked and the theologies they implied. When it came to the safety of their homes, health, and families, efficacy generally outweighed orthodoxy. Although this study is primarily focused on apotropaic practices, I hope that these conclusions may have applicability in the broader study of Christianization processes and the nature of ritual change.

Definitions of magic have themselves undergone dramatic change both historically and within academic discourse. Thus, in approaching this subject, it is helpful to provide a brief overview of what is meant by the term in this context, and to highlight some key considerations for approaching magic which have emerged from recent discourse. The earliest definitions tended to define magic in opposition to science, religion and rational thinking.[2] Later scholars

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1. Although I refer to "Christian influences," I do not mean to imply that there were strict religious distinctions at this time. This is merely a way of identifying new elements added to the *religious koine* (a body of common beliefs and practices) in order to look at their reactive dynamics. As Ra'anan Boustan and Joseph Sanzo point out, "the field should move beyond simply labeling elements based on their presumed historical or linguistic origins to consider the fluctuating nature of religious idioms and communal boundaries." Ra'anan Boustan, and Joseph Sanzo, "Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms, and the Shared Magical Culture of Late Antiquity," *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no. 2 (2017): 219.

2. In *The Golden Bough*, J. G. Frazer presents an evolutionary understanding of magic where magic represented a lower level of thinking from which mankind might progress to religious and scientific thinking. For Frazer, magic differs from science primarily through magic's misunderstanding of the laws

called these binaries into question and instead blurred the lines between these categories. The most recent wave of scholarship now advocates for a conceptual integration of magic – or the belief that supernatural power could be harnessed and used for one's own benefit[3] – into a spectrum of Orthodox practices comprising the rhythms of everyday religious life.[4] Therefore, my project will approach magic within the greater context of Orthodox Christian life, and the general variety and complexity of community-specific and individual expressions of faith.[5]

Some have made convincing arguments that in the Byzantine and Late Antique eras, protective rites, spells, and objects were not considered to be "magic" by people who regarded these practices as solely reactionary and defensive. For example, in approaching a collection which had previously been labeled "Coptic

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of nature, although they share the same goals. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed (London: Macmillan, 1922). 62. Cf. Lynn Thorndike, who adopts a broad definition of magic which encompasses witchcraft, the occult, folklore, divination, astrology and popular superstitions. Like Frazer, Thorndike emphasizes a connection between magic, science and religion in his definition, and presents magic as an undeveloped predecessor to organized religion and science. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Macmillan company, 1923).

3. Richard Greenfield, "A Contribution to Palaeologan Magic," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 219.

4. For an in-depth discussion of the evolution of "magic" in the study of the ancient world, see David Frankfurter, *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Attilio Mastrocinque, Joseph E. Sanzo, and Marianna Scapini, eds., *Ancient Magic: Then and Now* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020); and A. Alexakis, *The Greek Life of St. Leo Bishop of Catania* (BHG 981b), Subs. Hag. 91 (Brussels: Society of Bollandists, 2011), 90–91.

5. Academic journals like *Preturnatural* and *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* advocate a conceptual integration of magic into the spectrum of Orthodox behaviour and a similar approach can be seen at work in Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony and Derek Kreuger, eds., *Prayer and Worship in Eastern Christianities, 5th to 11th Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

magical spells," Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith instead opt to refer to these papyri as "texts of ritual power."[6] However, with these nuances of emic perception in mind, I will use magic as a catch-all term to refer to unorthodox ritual practices and popular religious rites which deviate in major ways from established orthodox practice.

Within the broad category of apotropaic rites, I will focus my analysis on protective devices, including written instructions for the creation of items such as those found in the *Greek Magical Papyri*. The word φυλακτήριον (phylacterion or phylactery) encompassed a wide range of objects with protective intent. It could be applied to crosses, icons, holy books, pilgrim mementos, amulets and other everyday items which had been infused with holy power such as water that had come into contact with a relic or oil from lamps around a shrine.[7] While some practices can be characterized fairly easily as either orthodox (icon veneration) or magical (demon summoning circles), protective magic varied wildly in practice with different instances ranging from "orthodox" to "magical" as well as from highbrow to lowbrow methods (see fig. 1). In this context, "highbrow" refers to the practices of the social elite which often required a significant monetary investment and "lowbrow" refers to the rites common among the general population which carried the connotation of being less cultured or sophisticated.

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6. Richard Smith and Martin Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 14.
7. Vicky Foskolou, "The Magic of the Written Word: The Evidence of Inscriptions on Byzantine Magical Amulets." *Δελτίον Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 35 (2014), 330.
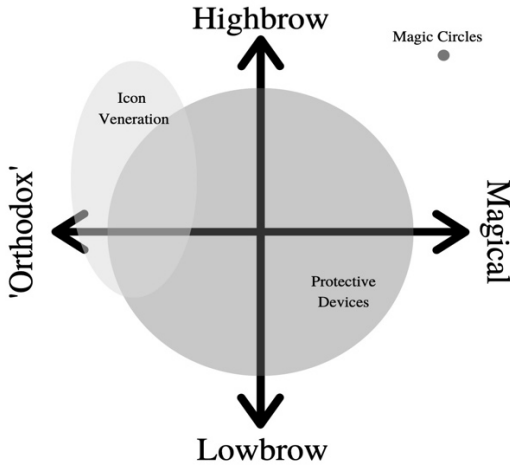
Figure 1: (Author's diagram)

Apotropaic devices were particularly prevalent because of their broad appeal across upper and lower classes. These items provide us with a window into popular practices which are normally clouded by the opinions of the religious authorities who denigrated them as superstitions, old wives' tales, or the ultimate insult, as magic. As Richard Gordon observes: "materiality studies attempt to divert attention from the intentionality of makers, a traditional preoccupation of historians, art historians and archaeologists, towards an appreciation of the effects of existing objects-in-the-world in constructing environments, situating modes of action, and stimulating modes of comprehension."[8] In short, through their visibility and frequency of use, apotropaic devices both reflect and create religious realities across the social spectrum.

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8. Richard Gordon, "'Straightening the Paths': Inductive Divination, Materiality and Imagination in the Graeco Roman Period," in *Ritual Matters: Material Remains and Ancient Religion*, ed. Claudia Moser and Jennifer Knust (The American Academy in Rome: Michigan Press, 2017), 120.

As Averil Cameron has observed, "the subject of Byzantine Religion desperately needs more theoretical and sociological analysis than it has had to date."[9] Although there have been a number of excellent studies, few have attempted any sort of sustained and thorough application; the use of sociological and anthropological theory to examine Byzantine religion is still in its infancy.[10] It seems likely that this trend towards theory application will continue and promises to yield some interesting insights in this area. As Byzantinists, we might take our cue from a slightly earlier period of history. In recent years, ritual theory has been applied to the field of Christian Origins and has resulted in some interesting studies.[11] Ritual theory may help us understand why protective magic took different forms at different times and places throughout the Byzantine period and why some practices lasted longer or were more resilient than others.[12]

First, what causes ritual change? Previous definitions of ritual have placed invariance and traditionalism as key elements.[13]

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9. Averil Cameron, "Thinking with Byzantium," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* vol. 21 (2011): 57.

10. For instance, in *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe*, Frederick S. Paxton opens with a chapter which discusses the relationship between history and ritual. Paxton explains how his book "is informed by closely related fields [...] especially anthropology and the new field of ritual studies" (Paxton, *Christianizing Death* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990], 5). See also Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002).

11. For further discussion see Richard E. DeMaris, Jason T. Lamoreaux and Steven C. Muir, eds., *Early Christian Ritual Life* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), and Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

12. In this discussion, I will use both "classical" ritual theory as well as theoretical advances made in the context of early Christian studies.

13. See Catherine M. Bell, "Characteristics of Ritual-like Activities" in *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions,* ed. Catherine M. Bell and Reza Aslan (Oxford:

However, the concept of ritual innovation, [14] or the idea that ritual can and does change over time, has been gaining ground, and religious practices are now seen as existing in a constant state of flux. Practices mutate and transform in response to (and perhaps even cause) various cultural stimuli, and current scholarship recognizes that there is far more fluidity between religion, magic, culture, family, politics, and other religious traditions than was originally thought. We can think of these forces as streams flowing into a pool of cultural meaning. Determining the causal force of religious change is a difficult endeavour because theology and ritual practice are so deeply interconnected. On one hand, ritual practices are often prohibited by the religious elite when they are not in line with theological imperatives and values. When these bans are enforced, it can deeply affect and even end a specific ritual practice. On the other hand, ritual practice transmits and creates religious knowledge. It is both a reflection of shared religious literacy as well as a way to teach religious practices and ideology to participants and onlookers. Far from being an unthinking overflow of ideology, ritual "thinks" much more than previous generations of scholarship believed.

Oxford University Press, 2009), 138–169.

14. The process by which rituals undergo alteration and development has gone by many names; among them, "transformation," "modification," "alteration," "adaptation," "innovation." There has been a great deal of debate over the differences between ritual modification and ritual adaptation. For further discussion see Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 295; and Richard S. Ascough, "Ritual Modification and Innovation," in *Early Christian Ritual Life*, ed. Richard E. DeMaris, Jason T. Lamoreaux and Steven C. Muir (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 168. However, I will not enter into this debate as it is beyond the scope of this paper, and will instead refer to all manner of ritual adaptations under the umbrella term of "ritual change."

Second, why do rituals endure and why do some last longer than others? At the most basic level, practices persist if people think that they work; their longevity is directly related to their perceived efficacy. Breaking this down further, I propose that the things which make rituals resilient involve (1) exposure to the rite at a young age, (2) repetition and embodied action which make these practices deeply rooted in the body, and (3) emotional currency, where rituals have high physical or spiritual stakes. For the average Christian in Late Antiquity and the Early Byzantine period, there was little instruction on the intricacies of belief and doctrine. Their education came from the spaces that they inhabited during worship, the items they came into contact with, and the rituals they performed. In addition to influencing ideologies, ritual also teaches pre-existing theologies. In *Ritual and Christian Beginnings,* Risto Uro examines the ability of ritual to create religious knowledge.[15] Using the example of baptism, Uro argues that these rituals communicated knowledge about power relationships. The ideas that participants learned about efficacy and power structures tended to last longer than those taught to them by the church later in life. Rituals can either contribute to or interact with (and potentially undermine) theology, hierarchy and social norms.[16] In this way, rituals are efficacious and resilient because of their impact on a generation of religious thinking.

Even when people do undergo comprehensive instruction later in life, their early experiences may form the deepest bedrock of belief.[17] This may explain why seemingly "pagan" practices persisted even among those who should have "known better," like

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15. Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 154.
16. Uro, *Ritual and Christian*, 116, 168.
17. Ronald Grimes, "Ritual Theory and the Environment," *The Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (2003): 34–35.

monks and local priests, by virtue of their theological training.[18] Given that protective devices were common household items, children would have been exposed to them from a young age; they would have witnessed their parents performing the rites associated with these items before they could walk or talk. Thus, even when Christian theologians and ecclesiastical authorities denounced certain rites (sometimes as superstition and sometimes as demonic), people continued to retain these practices.

This leads us to the next indicator of ritual resilience: repetition and embodiment. The bodily experiences of ritual practice interact with instruction on the meaning of these rites and have a lasting impact on religious memory.[19] Within the teaching process of ritual participation, the surrounding environment and physical objects involved serve as visual aids to enhance the lesson. In a recent publication, Nicola Hayward observes that there is a physical dimension to memory inherent in ritual; "embodied memory is shaped through our sensory experience, since it is through our senses that we negotiate our position within the world."[20] Although the ritual itself can evoke remembrance, the objects used in rituals function as mnemonic aids to memory in an embodied experience of remembrance. Hayward argues that objects play a key role in memory, so by examining them in combination with the ritual practice surrounding them, we may be able to re-construct ancient frameworks for remembrance. Alongside this,

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18. For instance, icon veneration was frequently denounced on the grounds that this practice was a remnant of bygone paganism. However, Iconophiles (as seen in several eighth and ninth century polemics) countered that the core of the action was directed towards the saints which legitimated the practice.
19. Uro, *Ritual and Christian,* 167.
20. Nicola Hayward, "Early Christian Funerary Ritual," in *Early Christian Ritual Life*, ed. Richard DeMaris, Jason Lamoreaux, and Steven Muir (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 114.

objects can also create, alter, and construct memory.[21] Thus, memory might be better understood as a conversation between ritual, artifact, and participant. Protective devices were items which users would come into frequent contact with. Household devices would have been seen multiple times a day and protective amulets were in constant contact with the wearer. The repetitive and embodied aspects of this form of magic give it a tremendous amount of staying power as it was deeply rooted in the body and memory.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) Durkheim introduces the concept of "collective effervescence."[22] This term refers to the times when communities come together to participate in the same action or communication method. These communal actions produce solidarity, a sense of well-being, exuberance, and joy. I would argue that these communal actions could also be understood to alleviate fear. Collective effervescence is both an interesting way to describe ritual and one that highlights the role of emotion in these practices. For the Byzantines and their near neighbours, demons were perceived as both a pressing and physical threat. Given the stakes, I think we can safely assume that rituals surrounding protection from demons were emotionally charged. This level of emotion gave these rites their longevity and allowed them to resist religious changes. Collective effervescence may also explain the flexibility of protective practices. As new ideas entered a community and were gradually adopted by its members, these people would contribute to the process of enacting and altering protective rituals. However, what gave practices their staying power was the emotional force behind them.

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21. Hayward, "Early Christian Funerary," 115.
22. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

As Vicky Foskolou observes in her article "Magic of the Written Word," things needed to *sound* magical to be considered efficacious. Across the ancient world, ideas about what made magic "work" varied. A community's efficacy framework was comprised of ideas drawn from various cultural and religious traditions. As new religious identities entered a community, they needed to operate within that society's cultural imagination. Rather than replacing existing forms of magic, Christianity merely added new words to an existing ritual vernacular with its own structure and syntax.

Given that popular religious practices and magic were already on the periphery of orthodoxy, there would have been very little attempt to align these practices with the dominant religious ideology at the time. Christian characters, ideas and practices were added into pre-existing synthetic ideas about magical efficacy. Many elements of protective magic thus cannot be identified as exclusively Christian, Jewish, Egyptian, or Pagan "but were part of a late antique magical koine."[23] As Rangar Cline points out, efficacy was much more important than orthodoxy when it came to protective magic.[24]

Before looking at examples on the fringes of Christendom, it is important to establish a baseline by looking at protective magic found in the centre of the empire. Given that Christianity emerged in the context of traditional Graeco-Roman religions, their influence on the development of Christian faith and practice needs to be addressed. It is best to view Christian traditions not as an *adoption* of pagan practices but as a *continuation* of them. Seeing as Christianity was built upon Graeco-Roman traditions, we cannot

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23. Rangar Cline, "Archangels, Magical Amulets and the Defence of Late Antique Miletus," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4, no. 1 (2011): 74.
24. Cline, "Archangels, Magical Amulets," 69.

refer to these as "pagan survivals," since they are really the bedrock of Christian development. The whole spectrum of beliefs ranging from the orthodox to the magical was formed in this way. David Frankfurter reiterates this sentiment and notes that "seemingly archaic religious elements appear in Christian form, not as survivals of bygone 'paganism,' but as building blocks in the *process* of Christianization."[25]

A good example of Graeco-Roman practices being creatively elaborated upon in Christian protective practices is the use of magic gems in otherwise "orthodox" amulets. Reliance on gemstones as healing or protective agents stretches back to classical antiquity (as early as the eighth century CE) where certain types of stones were associated with different powers and curative or protective qualities. For example, green jasper was frequently paired with images of the snake god with a cock's head, while yellow jasper and hematite was thought to be efficacious for the prevention and cure of uterine issues.[26]

As Christianity inherited this tradition, new characters and associations were introduced to this efficacy system. We can see these ideas at work in a hematite intaglio with an incised image of Jesus healing "the Woman with the Issue of Blood" spoken of in Mark 5: 25–34 and Luke 8: 43–48 (fig. 2). In form, this amulet retains the classical shape of oval protective gems and the association with uterine problems but also merges with Christian narrative.[27] At this intermediary stage we can see that Christian

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25. David Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2.
26. Carla Sfameni, "Magic in Late Antiquity: Evidence of Magical Gems," in *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, ed. David M. Gwynn and Susanne Bangert (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 444.
27. Foskolou, "The Magic of the Written," 345.

ideas operated within existing magical frameworks before elaborating upon them. This amulet, and many others like it, represent an interesting synthesis of pre-existing popular tradition and new, regionally specific ideas.

Figure 2: "Amulet Carved in Intaglio (Incised)," ca. sixth–seventh century CE. Hematite, silver mount. Byzantine Egypt. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, inv. 17.190.491 (Open Access).

As we shift our focus towards interactions between Christianity and other belief systems on the periphery, it is important to be aware that even this baseline of Christian practice at the heart of the empire is fuzzy and flexible. When Christianity encountered other belief systems, we cannot see these interactions as straightforward "Christian + pagan = ?" reactions. Ultimately, there is no "pure" Christian tradition or even a consistent magical methodology that we can see interacting with other indigenous belief systems. Instead, we should think of pre-Christian societies as complex, ongoing chemical reactions to which yet another ingredient is added.

Mesopotamian Apotropaic Bowls

Mesopotamian incantation or apotropaic bowls were generally plain ceramic bowls typical of Sassanian household plainware,[28] but with protective spells inscribed in a spiral on the inside of the bowl circling towards the centre (see fig. 3 and fig. 4). Most of the bowls were inscribed in Judeo-Aramaic, although a number were written in Syriac, Mandaic, Arabic and Persian.[29] An even smaller number were written in pseudo-scripts which attempted to replicate the Aramaic. In archaeological excavations of household sites, these bowls were often found inverted in room corners or buried beneath the threshold of the home. Several of them were found in pairs with the rims sealed together with bitumen. This form of protective magic seems to have been in use between the fourth and eighth centuries CE, but it reached the height of its popularity in the sixth and seventh centuries.[30] The basic idea behind this device was that the bowls would trap demons beneath them, much like an ant trap.

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28. David Frankfurter "Scorpion/Demon: On the Origin of the Mesopotamian Apotropaic Bowl," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 1 (2015): 9.

29. Although it would be tempting to divide these bowls along linguistic lines in order to associate them with different religions, J. C. Greenfield points out that this approach is far too simplistic. Attention needs to be re-focused on "shared syncretic magic beliefs common to all these religions, and a free borrowing of formulae" (Greenfield, "Notes on some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5 [1973]: 150).

30. Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford and Siam Bhayro, eds., *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, vol. 1 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 1. Although this form of magic flourished under the Sassanians, there is also evidence that it lasted throughout the Rashidun and later Umayyad Caliphates.

Figure 3: "Incantation Bowl with Aramaic Inscription," ca. fifth–sixth century CE. Ceramic and paint. Sassanian Mesopotamia. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, inv. 86.11.259 (open access).

Figure 4: "Incantation Bowl with Mandaic Inscription," ca. fifth–sixth century CE. Ceramic. Sassanian Mesopotamia (Ctesiphon). *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, inv. 32.150.89 (open access).

The culture residing in Mesopotamia (encompassing eastern Anatolia, Iraq and central Iran) at the time has been described as "Iranian-Semitic syncretism."[31] Zoroastrians, Jews, and adherents of traditional Sassanian religion were all represented with sizable populations in Babylonia during the third and fourth century CE. Christians, at that point, were relative newcomers. We can be reasonably confident that each group would have had some familiarity with other groups' religious and ritual traditions, and their interactions can be characterized by both religious debate and borrowing. Given their proximity, shared practices and ideas were common and contributed to a common efficacy framework that transcended religious and linguistic boundaries.

As Michael Morony observes, although the incantation bowl texts were written in different languages:

> these texts are regarded as forming a distinct corpus that reflects widespread magic practices in the Levant, Anatolia, Iraq, and western Iran from about the fourth to the seventh centuries CE. These practices represent a continuation of ancient Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian magic and share affinities with the Greek magical literature written on Egyptian papyri as well as to the early Jewish *Hekhalot* literature and the later Jewish magical texts from the Cairo Geniza.[32]

Although Sassanian Babylonians were different in many ways, they shared ideas about how magic worked. Additionally, "the names of the clients testify to the mixed religious population in Late Antique Iraq, where there were Jews, Mandaeans, Zoroastrians, Christians,

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31. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 1.
32. Michael Morony, "Religion and the Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 4 (2007): 414.

Manichaeans, and even pagans."[33]

This was a society where the written word carried high prestige,[34] in part, due to the well-established Jewish tradition in Late Antique Mesopotamia. The rise of Jewish written magic corresponds with a trend towards a literary-dependant form of Judaism with an emphasis on written law and scripture. Writing was considered to be ritually efficacious in officially sanctioned as well as popular forms of piety.[35] Like most forms of Jewish magic at this time, these bowls were generally protective or preventative in nature rather than aggressive or reactive.[36] Many bowls contain the formula "This is a [charm/spell] to overturn [sorceries/curses/ evil/vows/spells/ magical rites]."

Sometimes these dark forces are vague, as in VA.2509:1–4: "This is a charm to overturn sorceries and vows and curses and curses and afflictions." Other times a specific force is named, as in VA.2424:3–4: "This is a charm for overturning the evil *Yaror*." [37] The inscriptions tend to follow a general pattern: an opening invocation followed by the purpose of the spell, for instance, "This bowl/amulet is designated for the salvation/sealing of the house etc.,of NN […]." This is followed by the naming of specific parties, the name spell and finally a closing summary.[38]

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33. Morony, "Religion and the Aramaic," 419.
34. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells,* 4.
35. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 6.
36. Both Dan Levene and E. M. Yamauchi refer to incantation bowls as a form of "White Magic." Although most of these bowls are apotropaic in nature, there are several examples of aggressive forms which Dan Levene examines in his monograph *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia: "May These Curses Go Out and Flee"* (Leiden: Brill 2013), 1. Also see E. M. Yamauchi, "Aramaic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965): 520.
37. *Vorderasiatisches Museum*, inv. VA.2509 and inv. VA.2424 via Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse,* 2.
38. Shaul Shaked, "Jesus in the Magic Bowls. Apropos Dan Levene's '... and

Yaror, Lillith and the evil eye were three of the most pressing evil forces to insure against. A number of bowls phrase their spells as a divorce writ against Lillith. For example, one spell begins with: "This is the deed of divorce of the accursed Lillith, which I have written for Immi daughter of Qaqay."[39] It is unlikely that these texts were read aloud as many contain the tetragrammaton (YHWH)[40] as well as specific demonic names. It is possible that if the name of the Lord was not to be spoken aloud, this same logic would apply to demons who may be summoned by the invocation of their names. Thus, written curse formulae may have been thought to be the best recourse against them.

To fully understand how these bowls were thought to "work" it is helpful to look at the trajectory of this form of magic. Both David Frankfurter and Ortal-Paz Saar have put forward compelling arguments about the origins and ritual precedents of these bowls. For Frankfurter, the apotropaic bowl of Late Antique Mesopotamia "derived from an earlier domestic practice, attested (so far) only in the Mishnah […] of placing a bowl over a scorpion (or other harmful materials) on the floor of a house to protect household members, especially children, and quite possibly to isolate the scorpion for killing."[41] He draws attention to a number of passages in the Mishnah which make provisions for trapping scorpions under bowls on the sabbath and hypothesises that it is likely that this trapping would be accompanied by protective prayers or incantations against the dangers which the scorpion represented. This practical exercise was eventually elaborated upon

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by the Name of Jesus ...,'" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1999), 309–319.

39. *Schøyen Collection* inv. JBA 52 (MS 2053/ 231) via Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford and Siam Bhayro, eds., *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 233.

40. Rather than a spoken alternative like *Adonai* or *Hashem*.

41. Frankfurter, "Scorpion/Demon," 17.

and took on magical connotations, and the method could be applied to other dangerous forces like demons. Frankfurter sees the inverted bowl as a "symbolic miniaturization of the room or domestic space" prescribing the demons' proper place within the home to ensure a harmonious relationship.[42]

In a recent article, Ortal-Paz Saar draws a connection between the paired sealed apotropaic bowls and Mesopotamian double-jar burial practices, which are attested to from the second millennium to the sixth century BCE and exhibit similarities of form, content and function.[43] As was previously mentioned, a number of apotropaic bowls have been found sealed together at the rim to form a closed system inside the bowls. These apotropaic bowls occasionally contain human or animal bones or pieces of inscribed eggshells,[44] which may have functioned as offerings or as bait for the demons to be trapped within the bowl sets.

Earlier double-jar burials in Mesopotamia were extremely similar in form; they "consisted of two large, wide-mouthed jars (equally termed "pots"), whose rims faced each other, the deceased being laid to rest in the space between them," and were sealed inside with bitumen. In essence, Saar argues that apotropaic bowls miniaturize these older ritual patterns and apply methods used for burials to demonic forces.[45] These similarities of form may imply that a similar ritual-logic was at work in both practices (see fig. 5). If one accepts this argument, then it appears that these late apotropaic bowls drew upon much older ritual methods with the intention of either literally or figuratively, trapping and burying demons. Like Frankfurter, Saar also proposes a process of ritual

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42. Frankfurter, "Scorpion/Demon," 13.
43. Ortal-Paz Saar, "Mesopotamian Double-Jar Burials and Incantation Bowls," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 318, no. 4 (2018): 863–873.
44. Saar, "Mesopotamian Double-Jar," 868.
45. Saar, "Mesopotamian Double-Jar Burials," 871.

development wherein practical procedures become ritualized and infused with magical significance over time.
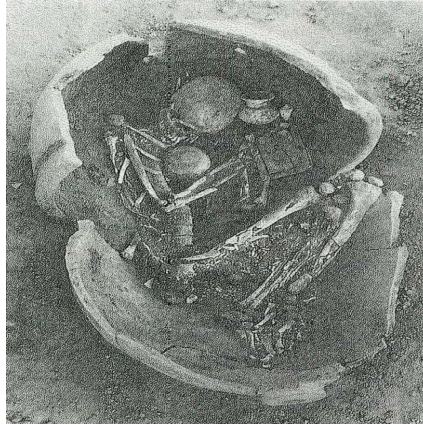
Figure 5: Double-jar burial from Uruk in Boehmer, Pedde and Salje *Uruk: Die Graber* grave 423. After Ortal-Paz Saar (2018).

Whether one agrees with Frankfurter or Saar's claims (or some combination of the two) regarding the origins of Mesopotamian apotropaic bowls, what does seem clear is that demons were thought of as beings that *could* be trapped beneath bowls. In this case, it also seems highly probable that demons were conceived of, if not as scorpions, as some sort of small, dangerous, physical beings which walked or crawled upon the ground. This is perhaps in stark contrast to Egyptian and Graeco-Roman Christian ideas about demons in other parts of the world. It would be hard to imagine Christians in Rome trapping demons beneath bowls when their conceptions of the demonic were much more amorphous. It is equally difficult to imagine Mesopotamian scorpion-like demons being repelled by papyrus or metal amulets with inscribed texts. In this way, we can see that local cosmologies and mental images of demons played a significant role in shaping conceptions of effective ways to repel them.

In sum, these bowls are the result of trends within Judaism interacting with elements found in ancient Mesopotamia's religio-magical culture that existed prior to the introduction of Christianity. They are a good candidate for ritual resilience because these bowls are found in the homes of the average person and are thus considered a lowbrow form of magic. Although much of Jewish magic was an elite pursuit,[46] stemming from a learned tradition, this particular form was reasonably accessible. Bowls were cheap and plentiful and their inscription, although requiring the work of a ritual expert, could be done quickly without any costly materials. Even literacy seems not to have been an inhibitor as many of the bowls were written in a pseudo-script.

Additionally, these bowls seem to be common household items, and it is likely that children would have come into contact with them, or with rites surrounding their functionality, at a young age. This, combined with the emotionally charged necessity of protecting the home and its inhabitants, make it reasonable to assume that the practice would be particularly resilient and create a deep imprint on ideas of ritual efficacy for those born into this magical framework. Although Babylon and the surrounding area was never under Christian control during this time frame, Christian ideas would have come across the Byzantine-Sassanian border. As Christianity was introduced into the Near Eastern region, we begin

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46. In discussing the work of Michael Swartz, Gideon Bohak observes that "the Jewish magical tradition was not the domain of the lower-classes, as some of its practitioners clearly had good scribal and scriptural training and may perhaps be classified as a 'secondary elite.'" See: Gideon Bohak, "Ancient Jewish Magic," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Jewish Studies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012); Michael Swartz, "Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Kratz (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 699–720. It is also likely that the lower classes would be able to access magical items through these secondary elite.

to see the incorporation of some Christian elements into the apotropaic bowls. However, residual ideas about ritual efficacy continued to inform popular practice.

A number of these apotropaic bowls contain explicit references to Christianity. I will highlight a few of these. M163 from the private collection of Shlomo Moussaieff was published first by Dan Levene in 1999.[47] This bowl follows the general Jewish magical formulae found in other bowls, makes references to the Babylonian Talmud, the Hebrew Mishnah and invokes YHWH and the angels. Although Aramaic would have been common in certain regions of the Near East, knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures was not. We can therefore infer that the writer had insider knowledge of Judaism.

Although most of the text appears to be in line with Jewish belief systems, there are also some possible references to Zoroastrian cosmology.[48] Moreover, the final sentences call upon Jesus and evoke Christian ideas. The incantation concludes with the following sentence:

> By the name of I-am-that-I-am YHWH sb'wt, and by the name of Jesus, who conquered the height and depth by his cross, and by the name of the exalted father, and by the name of the holy spirit(s) forever and eternity. Amen amen selah. This press is true and established.[49]

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47. Dan Levene, "'... and by the Name of Jesus ...' An Unpublished Magic Bowl in Jewish Aramaic," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1999): 283–308. For further discussion see Shaul Shaked, "Jesus in the Magic Bowls. Apropos Dan Levene's '... and by the Name of Jesus ...'" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1999): 309–319.
48. Shaked, "Jesus in the Magic," 312.
49. *Moussaieff Collection*, inv. M163 via Levene, "…and by the name," 290. Levene notes that the plural (holy spirits) could also be read as the feminine

Although Jesus is one name invoked at the end of a long list of deities in this incantation, as a way to "cover all the bases" of heavenly powers,[50] this text implies a reasonable understanding of the Christian message as well as an intimate knowledge of Judaism. This either implies a synthetic tradition or a Jewish magic user who was comfortable incorporating Christian allusions. However, although new names and ideas were worked in, the general format remains the same regardless of more superficial alterations.

Other apotropaic bowls contain images of the cross, trinitarian formulae, and references to Jesus and to Christian scriptures. For instance, IBC 3 incorporates a New Testament passage from Ephesians.[51] Many are so syncretic that they do not see any contradiction between denouncing Jewish magic and calling upon the Jewish God: one bowl seeks protection from "the curse of Jews" but then goes on to call upon the angels Michael, Mesamsiel

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neuter singular (302). This is similar to how this name would appear in Greek, for the spirit ($\pi\nu\varepsilon\tilde{\upsilon}\mu\alpha$) is a neuter noun but has a feminine declension.

50. Forces invoked range from the explicitly Jewish (El Shaddai, Elohim, YHWH, Sabaoth) to Graeco-Roman gods (Aphrodite, Zeus, Hermes, Protogenos etc.), to Mesopotamian deities (Sin, Samis, Nabu, Bel etc.) to Christian Jesus. Many Babylonian deities are demoted in these bowls and listed as demons. A phenomenon that also occurs with the Iranian deity Bagdana, who is later listed as the king of demons. Morony explains that this trend is a somewhat darker side of the syncretic process in which new belief systems "demonized" earlier religious traditions: "syncretism might not only involve using, adopting, or copying aspects of some other religion in a positive sense; it might also involve reversing the value or meaning of some borrowed aspect and creating a mirror image of the other religion" (Morony, "Religion and the Aramaic," 420).

51. *Bibliothèque Centrale de l'Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik,* inv. IBC 3. For further analysis see Joseph E. Sanzo and Nils H. Korsvoll, "A New Testament Text on a Syrian Incantation Bowl: Eph. 6:10–17 in IBC 3," *Vigiliae Christianae* 71, no. 4 (2017): 417–432.

and Nadiriel as well as Sabaoth.[52] In terms of artwork and figures drawn on the bowls, in addition to images from ancient Mesopotamian magical tradition, their creators tended to adopt iconographic motifs from Christian artwork. These symbolic images were being developed in other areas at that time and included dragons, crosses, and armed figures like the Holy Rider. The use of these hybrid depictions reflects the environment in which they were made and "supports the idea that they drew their inspiration from local magic and religious literature [and that] the Jews adopted their iconography from their non-Jewish neighbours."[53]

It is also worth noting some forms of magic that we *do not* see in this region during this period. Some inscribed metal amulets have survived from Sassanian Mesopotamia, but these are generally written in Mandaic. Almost no papyrus or leather written amulets have been found.[54] Also, although gem and stone amulets are quite common here, they tend to lack any written text and only a handful of inscribed gems have survived.[55] This is in stark contrast to the situation in Palestine where worn amulets with written incantations were wildly popular. This indicates that Graeco-Roman Christian forms of magic were not as resilient here because the Mesopotamians lacked the specific efficacy framework needed to support these forms. "Christian" forms of magic did not displace pre-existing structures but worked their names and symbols into the Mesopotamian magical efficacy framework.

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52. *Schøyen Collection* inv. JBA 52 (MS 2053/ 231) via Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 232.
53. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 35.
54. This may be at least partially due to the Mesopotamian climate.
55. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 2.

Egyptian Amulet Instructions and
Protective Grave Goods

Before looking at the specific examples of written amulets and apotropaic "grave goods" (items buried with the deceased meant to aid them in the afterlife), it is helpful to first examine the broader trends of the Christianization process in Egypt. Before the arrival of Christianity, Egypt already had a well-developed demonology and a syncretic "religious vocabulary" in which indigenous Egyptian religions had been (often forcibly) blended with Hellenic ideas.[56] As Christianity was introduced, it slowly began to add new words into this religious lingua-franca.[57]

As Peter Brown observes in "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," holy men played an important role in introducing Christianity to the Egyptian populace and influenced the development of Egyptian Christianity.[58] David Frankfurter expands upon these ideas in his article "The Threat of Headless Beings," where he highlights the role of the monk as a mediator between the quiet, contemplative world of monasticism and the chaotic world of the laity wracked by social, economic and spiritual stressors. Monks served these communities as ritual experts specializing in the identification and eradication of demons. Their status as demon specialists gave them a certain degree of "improvisational capacity" which they used to synthesize indigen-

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56. Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in the Fourth-Century Papyri* (Turnout: Brepols, 2006).
57. It is important to note that these "religious vocabularies" took on what I will call "regional dialects" as they were exposed to different elements in different places around Egypt. To complicate this even further, demons were often conceived of as being attached to different features of the landscape and thus rural demonology would look very different from urban perceptions.
58. Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (January 1, 1971): 80–101.

ous and Christian ideas about demons.[59] This emphasis by monks created a snowballing supply and demand effect which tended to compound existing preoccupations with dark forces and culminated in a "helplessly demon-ridden cosmos."[60]

However, the Christianization process was not only top-down but also occurred at the grassroots level. In fact, it is perhaps most observable at the level of popular religion which shows "a Christianity in gradual, creative assemblage, whose principle or immediate agents may have been local scribes, mothers protecting children, or artisans."[61] In other words, syncretism was a process in which everyone participated. For these participants, incorporating Christian ideas was often a simple matter of substitution. For example, Jesus often comes to replace the Egyptian Horus with a minimum of disruption in popular stories.[62] Ultimately the forms of traditional Egyptian magic stayed the same but with new characters introduced to the extensive existing cast.

The Greek Magical Papyri is the title given to the body of literature from Graeco-Roman Egypt containing a variety of magical spells, diagrams, instructions, hymns and rituals.[63] These fragments range in age from the second century BCE to the fifth century CE. This study will focus on the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM) subset. Many of the prescribed rituals and incantations here

59. David Frankfurter, "The Threat of Headless Beings: Constructing the Demonic in Christian Egypt," in *Fairies, Demons and Nature Spirits: 'Small' Gods at the Margins of Christendom*, ed. Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 61.

60. David Frankfurter, "Protective Spells" in *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power,* ed. Richard Smith and Martin Meyer (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 106.

61. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 5.

62. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 1.

63. Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), xli.

combine elements of Greek, Egyptian and Jewish religion. Hans Dieter Betz argues that "this syncretism is more than a hodge-podge of heterogeneous items. In effect, it is a new religion altogether displaying unified religious attitudes and beliefs."[64] I would argue that this is evidence of a shared body of ritual knowledge and that these texts provide insight into popular religion at the time.

Literacy was an important component in Late Antique Egyptian protective magic. The written text of the charms takes on magical qualities of its own, aside from the spirits that it calls upon. This draws from the logic behind Greek and Jewish *phylacteries* where the text itself has magical properties rather than just being an aid to devotion. Additionally, these magical instructions seemed to be aimed at individuals who could perform these spells on their own, rather than purchasing them through an intermediary. This would imply that literacy was an essential prerequisite for using magic.[65]

Naming the demons and spirits seems to be the main way in which they were bound to the magic user's will. Magic users attempted to hedge their bets by listing a variety of forces and even giving multiple names for the same spirit. These instructions invoke supernatural powers from Egyptian, Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions. They frequently call upon Greek gods like Persephone, Hermes and Bacchus and often use both the Greek and Roman names for the same gods or goddesses, for example, Kore and Persephone.[66] However, these spells also invoke Egyptian gods like Anubis and Thoth. The spirit "Amoun"[67] could refer to either the Egyptian god of life or to the early fourth century Christian ascetic

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64. Betz, *The Greek Magical*, xlv–xlvi.
65. In this period (fourth to seventh century CE), literacy would generally be restricted to men.
66. *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM) IV. 296–433.
67. PGM IV. 296–433.

popular in Egypt. Finally, *Barbaradonai* may be a combination of the Greek βάρβαρος indicating a foreigner or non-Greek speaker, and '*adonai*' (Ἀδωναί) a Hebrew word for the Jewish God. Other spirits are listed that do not fit neatly into any orthodox religious tradition, like *Ichanarmentho Chasar*,[68] *Abrasax*, and *Ablanathanalba*.[69] The invocation of these new forces not found in other faith systems could indicate an established tradition combined with a shared magical vernacular.[70] After listing a number of spirits, gods and demons to call upon, many of the instructions add that the user can "add the usual, whatever you wish."[71] Here it is assumed that the reader knows what forces to invoke and the implicit understanding that different forces might be chosen in different circumstances, which shows that these practitioners had a certain degree of magical literacy in this hybrid vernacular.

We will now turn to a few examples of amulet texts and instructions. I am focusing purely on protective texts here and have not included reactive *phylacteries* and those which seek to heal existing medical conditions, as this begins to muddy the waters. In these magical instructions, we can often see Christian figures woven into the "exorcistic and apotropaic formulae employed in classical Egyptian texts."[72] Recurring phrases like "every demon, whether male or female" carry on but with Christian figures entering these formulae.[73] In PGM P6a (P. Oxy VIII 1152) Jesus Christ is named

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68. PGM VII. 462–466.
69. PGM LXXI. 1–8.
70. It is also worth noting the tone and language used in invoking these forces. Invocations are phrased like commands rather than requests. Magic users seemed to have power *over* rather than power *through* the spirits that they called.
71. PGM VII. 459–61.
72. Frankfurter, "Protective Spells," 108.
73. Frankfurter, "Protective Spells," 108.

alongside Egyptian and Jewish figures in the magical tradition of "listing":

> Ὡρ, Ὡρ, Φωρ, Ἐλωεί, Ἀδωναί, Ἰάω, Σαβαώθ, Μιχαήλ, Ἰεσοῦ Χριστέ· Βοήθι ἡμῖν καὶ τούτῳ οἴκῳ. ἀμήν. Hôr, Hôr, Phôr, Elôei, Adônai, Iaô, Sabaôth, Michaêl, Jesus Christ. Help us and this house. Amen.[74]

De Bruyn and Diijkstra observe that in these inclusions of Christian elements we see:

> varying degrees of continuity and change in the form that the invocation takes. Several charms employ a traditional form of incantation whereby evil spirits are adjured (ὀρκίζω) to leave someone or to do something. Others call upon God or Christ to heal as they once called upon the gods. Magical signs (χαρακτῆρες) are still enjoined to heal […] But alongside pre-existing forms of incantation we also find petitions phrased as prayers.[75]

Additionally, protective amulets with Christian elements can also be seen in charms to protect houses like PGM P2, P2a and P3 which include crosses.[76] In this early stage in the Christianization of Egypt, traditional forms remained but acquired new characters in the lists of the forces they invoked and the symbols that they used. It seems likely that the written traditions and formulae in the magical papyri remained consistent because they were thought to be effective and had a long history of past success. The amulets made using these

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74. PGM P6a via Boustan and Sanzo, "Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms," 217.
75. Theodore S. De Bruyn and Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, "Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 48 (January 1, 2011): 178–179.
76. De Bruyn and Dijkstra, "Greek Amulets," 186–187.

instructions would be worn daily and carried the emotional weight of their owner's hope for security, thus making them a particularly long-lasting form of magic. Ritual participants in Egypt retained the core elements of their magical recipes but began to introduce some Christian ingredients to create a "new and improved" formula which would better reflect the regional flavours present in their changing religious landscape.

Another form of protective magic into which we see Christian ideas being woven is apotropaic grave goods. As Eric Rebillard observes, "in Late Antiquity, Christianity was not concerned with the burial of the dead, nor even to a great extent with their memory."[77] Even by the sixth century, the family, not the church, was responsible for burial and commemoration as there were no ecclesiastically imposed rituals to follow. Therefore, it was easy for Christian converts to continue to work within the pre-existing efficacy systems for burials, commemoration, and the protection of the dead against demonic forces.

Depositing apotropaic items into the graves of friends and family members was already an ancient tradition in Egypt before the arrival of Christianity. Many of the items found in graves in the fourth to sixth century are in line with those found hundreds of years earlier, pointing to a continuance of tradition. Even before the arrival of Christianity, the later Pharaonic period saw an increasing preoccupation with providing protection to the deceased through apotropaic and amuletic magic.[78] It would seem that this inclination

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77. Eric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 177–178.
78. Anne Marie Luijendijk, "Jesus Says: 'There Is Nothing Buried That Will Not Be Raised': A Late-Antique Shroud with Gospel of Thomas Logion 5 in Context," *Zeitschrift fur Antikes Christentum/ Journal of Ancient Christianity* 15, no. 3 (2011): 405.

grew stronger over the years and drew further strength from the increasing fear of demons spurred on by Christian monastics.

Older studies have often operated under the assumption that an absence of buried items in Egyptian cemeteries was an indicator of Christianization. However, more recent scholarship is increasingly coming to the conclusion that new Christians carried on traditional Egyptian practices of burying protective items alongside the deceased and merely applied Christian images, names and scriptures to these items.[79] As Alexandra Plesa observes, these communities "developed particular burial practices and beliefs that were strongly linked to old local traditions, mixing elements of traditional and Christian beliefs."[80] We can also see the use of apotropaic grave goods as a continuation of worn amulet tradition. The charms that people wore in life would go with them into the grave and then into the afterlife.

In some cases, Christian scripture was inscribed or embroidered onto clothing or shrouds. For example, AnneMarie Luijendijk draws attention to a linen shroud with a verse from the Gospel of Thomas written on it which was evidently intended to protect the recipient until the resurrection: λέγει Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν τεθαμμένον ὃ οὐκ ἐγερθήσεται (Jesus says: There is nothing buried that will not be raised). Other funerary garments depicted scenes from the Bible. Images narrating the life of Joseph were particularly popular on children's clothing and were likely thought to protect the wearer from similar misfortunes (see fig. 6).[81]

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79. Alexandra D. Plesa, "Religious Belief in Burial, Funerary Dress and Practice at the Late Antique and Early Islamic Cemeteries at Matmar and Mostagedda, Egypt (Late Fourth‒Early Ninth Centuries CE)," *Ars Orientalis* 47 (2017): 35.

80. Plesa, "Religious Belief in Burial," 32.

81. Edmund C. Ryder, "Popular Religion: Magical Uses of Imagery in Byzantine Art," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The

Figure 6: "Roundel Illustrating Episodes from the Biblical Story of Joseph," ca. seventh century CE. Textile Brocade. Coptic Egypt. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, inv. 63.178.2 (open access).

Crosses and other Christian symbols like the *chi-rho* worked their way into apotropaic jewelry, caskets, and textiles.[82] New, explicitly Christian items like prayer books or miniature gospels meant to keep demons away or perhaps to serve as guidebook for the deceased as they navigated the increasingly treacherous way to heaven were also included. Although the living would not have been exposed to this form of magic on a day-to-day

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008).
82. Plesa, "Religious Belief in Burial," 30–32. See also Henry Maguire's discussion of Christian images on textiles and funerary shrouds in his "Magic and the Christian Image," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 51–71.

basis, funerals were frequent occurrences, as were visits to the graves of the deceased. Given the frequency of people's exposure to these items as well as the heightened emotional context of that exposure, this form of magic was seen as efficacious and enjoyed a long life (and afterlife) in Egypt.

In conclusion, both today and in the Byzantine eras, people have searched for the best ways to protect their families, health, and homes from destructive forces. The protective strategies that people in newly Christianized areas employed tended to be those which were most deeply rooted in their community. Although these forms of magic might employ ideas, figures and symbols from Christianity, their protective practices tended to rely on old, proven methods. Through participants' exposure to these rites at a young age, repetition, embodied action and emotional charge, these actions had become ritually resilient. Jumping forward a millennium and a half, I think that my tea-based defence against COVID-19 likely stems from memories of my mother and grandmother making it for me as a child at the first sign of any flu symptoms. These repetitive, emotionally charged precautions have influenced the way I think about illness and the best ways to fight it today. Taking a step back from the phenomena we observe whether it be in the forms of viruses or demons, allows us further insight into the larger trends of ritual life. This vantage point also provides us with greater empathy towards the impulse to return to the comfort of well-worn ritual paths.

The Consecration and Profanation of "Madonna and Child": Seeing Religious Art in the Age of Cinematic Mobility[1]

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This paper will examine and analyze the experience of viewing "religious art" in non-religious spaces (specifically museums),[2] and problematize the fact that, within such secular spaces, religious art is framed in a way that reduces it to its materiality, thereby obscuring the fact that such art can evoke a mood which religious scholars have identified as a fundamental component of human religiosity: the subjunctive mood. I argue that the possibility of religious art to effect this evocation is related to what I refer to below as the "cinematic mobility" viewers have when engaging with such works of art.

This paper will begin by critically reflecting on the fact that, since the Enlightenment, there has been a predominant tendency to view religious traditions and their material culture through a rationalist and secular lens. This framing has given rise to the

2. While there are some religious spaces – such as certain parts of the Vatican – which present curations of the institution's own lineage and history and are branded as "museums," this article specifically discusses the modern art museum as defined by the disciplinary precepts of Art History, where museums are understood to be secular spaces.

conceptualization of "religious art," a rationalist nomenclature which secularizes and commodifies formerly sacred objects. However, it is my argument that, despite this secular framing, the "sacred" nature of religious art can never be fully erased – religious artwork contains the social and somatic memories associated with their ritualistic use,[3] and these memories can be evoked even when the art is presented in a setting that encourages a secular perceptual framing. In other words, borrowing from Walter Benjamin's discussion of the *mémoire involontaire* (involuntary memory),[4] I argue that religious art can recall and reproduce the social or somatic memory of its religious/ritualistic use, and that this recalling and reproducing is arguably what constitutes the "sacred" aura of such art. While modern secular education emphasizes the materiality of art in a way that discourages this type of evocative experience, part of what makes religious objects "religious" is their ability to invoke these types of evocative experiences, which, in turn, generates meaning that transcends the art's secular, materialist framing. The meaning that religious objects are able to evoke is rooted in what ritual theorists such as Jonathan Z. Smith, Michael Puett, Adam Seligman and Victor Turner refer to as "the subjunctive mode of being."[5] In Turner's words, the subjunctive

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3. The phrases "somatic memory" and "social memory" are inspired by David Morgan's differentiation between the "somatic body" and the "social body." For a nuanced discussion of Morgan's phraseology, see *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 55–60.

4. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Selected Writings 1938–40*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 337–38.

5. See Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Adam Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Simon Bennett, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008); Victor

mode of being refers to "the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire" – it is a mode of being that turns our attention towards the human capacity to carve out a better future for the world.[6] By containing the possibility of invoking a subjunctive mood, religious art facilitates what Robert Bellah refers to as the human capacity for "beyonding" – a "symbolic transcendence" that allows us to see "the realm of daily life *in terms of* a realm beyond it."[7]

Accordingly, I argue that the secular rationalist move to encourage non-religious perceptual framings of art will never fully succeed, as the sacred aura of art – i.e., the potential it contains to evoke the subjunctive mode of being – cannot be stifled by the fact that most people view religious art in secular institutional settings, such as public or private museums. This will be accomplished via an examination of the Madonna and Child iconography found in the Stefano Bardini Museum, where I will demonstrate that the changing perceptual frames facilitated by cinematic mobility allows viewers to perceive religious artworks, not in purely material terms, but rather as expressions of the subjunctive mode of human existence, expressions which, in turn, can invoke a subjunctive mood in the viewer as well.

Framing "Religious Art"

Daniel Miller, in developing a thesis made by art historian Ernst H. Gombrich, puts forth a rather radical view on the

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Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987).

6. Victor Turner and Edward M. Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 42.

7. Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: from the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 9.

relationship between framing and the "existence" of art:

> Art exists only insomuch as frames such as art galleries or the category of 'art' itself ensure that we pay particular respect, or pay particular money, for that which is contained within such frames. It is the frame, rather than any quality independently manifested by the artwork, that elicits the special response we give it as art.[8]

In other words, it is Miller's argument that "art" is "art" by nature of its framing as such, rather than by nature of some inherent property it contains. Miller thus adds a third dimension to the traditional binary understanding of what constitutes art – it is not just a matter of materiality and representation, but also of framing. On a micro level, the monetary buying power of an art collector and the acquired knowledge of an art historian are part of the framing or the "naturalization process" that transforms an image or an object into art. On a macro level, there are also epistemological framings which take form over time.

According to the argument put forward by Hans Belting in *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Age of Art* (1994), religious art fits this category of epistemological framing, because, until the Renaissance, religious imagery was produced, not for aesthetic purposes, but rather to enable the viewer to enter into the sacred presence of whatever was depicted, be it Christ, the Saints, Mary, etc. He refers to this period as "the era of the image." After the Renaissance, however, the modern sense of art began to take shape, and art increasingly came to be understood as something to be appreciated in purely aesthetic terms.[9] In other words, it is

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8. See Daniel Miller, *Materiality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.
9. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Age of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). As W.J.T. Mitchell puts

Belting's thesis that the secular epistemology of modernity made the secular epistemological framing of religious art dominant – so dominant, in fact, that he believes the era of art "replaces" the era of the image.[10]

Belting's account of the "era of the image" has found wide support and has generated several recent studies by Glenn Peers, Chris M. Woolgar and Patricia Cox Miller,[11] who generally concur that that the church's absolute control over the consecration, custody, meaning, (co-)mission, display and discharge of sacred images in late antiquity and medieval Christendom was such that to "see" a sacred image was to partake in the synesthetic experience of worship.[12] As Woolgar demonstrates, the notion of "religious art" was foreign in the middle ages.[13] However, Belting's assertion that the era of art supplants the era of the image – transforming the latter into "a memory from olden times"[14] – has been contested. For

it in his discussion of Belting's thesis in *What Do Pictures Want?*, in the era of art, "any 'power' in the image is now a delicately adjusted 'aesthetic response' that does not overwhelm the beholder in the way that traditional religious and magical icons did." See Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 95.

10. Belting, *Likeness and Presence,* 490.

11. Glenn Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Chris Woolgar, "What Makes Things Holy? The Senses and Material Culture in the Later Middle Ages," in *Sensing the Sacred in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. R. Macdonald, E. Murphy, and E. Swann (London: Routledge, 2018).

12. See: Peers, *Sacred Shock*; Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination*; Woolgar, "What Makes Things Holy?" I use the term "synesthetic" because, during this time, seeing a sacred image invoked the synesthetic experience of seeing-as-feeling – that is to say, of seeing (religious art)-as-feeling (a religious sentiment).

13. See Woolgar, "What Makes Things Holy," 70.

14. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 490.

example, Megan Holmes has noted that the Renaissance was an age when the production of miraculous images in Italy was at an all-time high.[15] Likewise, Adrian Randolph demonstrates that, while fifteenth century works of art were indeed increasingly "defined by their eliciting visual rather than haptic responses," this did not stop congregants throughout Europe from engaging in the intimate act of kissing the *instrumentum pacis* (the Kiss of Peace)[16] – an act which I argue is best understood as a response provoked by what I've referred to above as the "sacred aura" of the art. Accordingly, the era of art should not be understood as supplanting the era of the image, but rather as inaugurating a dynamic period where the sacred and secular auras of religious artwork co-exist. This article argues that we are still living in this dynamic period, and, moreover, that even in the secular space of the art museum, sacred images can continue to inspire a subjunctive mood in those who behold them.

The term "subjunctive mood" comes from ritual theory,[17] which argues that humans perceive the world in two modes simultaneously: the indicative mode which perceives the world as it is, and the subjunctive mode which envisions the world as it ought to be.[18] As Seligman puts it, ritual represents a continuous subjun-

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15. Holmes defines miraculous images as those distinguished by their extraordinary efficacy as sites of votive petition, sacred intersession, and miraculous manifestations. Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 3, 13.
16. See Adrian Randolph, *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-Century Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 214–217.
17. Following Jonathan Z. Smith, this article defines ritual as an embodied and communal practice of cultural orientation through the repeated observance of prescribed and proscribed behavior, thoughts, wishes and desires. See Smith, *Toward Theory in Ritual*, 103.
18. See Smith, *To Take Place*; Seligman, Weller, Puett, and Bennett, *Ritual and its Consequences*; Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*.

ive enactment of the world's "better" potentialities and possibilities.[19] Similarly, Seligman, Weller, Puett and Simon argue that the subjunctive mode constitutes a "could be," a mutual illusion which rituals create and sustain.[20] While these theorists are largely focused on the subjunctive mood as it relates to ritual, they also note that it can be inspired by "the antistructural liminality provided in […] aesthetic forms,"[21] and, accordingly, I argue that this explains why religious art resists the purely material and aesthetic viewing experience encouraged by secular perceptual framings: religious works of art are expressions of the subjunctive mood, which, in turn, invite the viewer to participate in the subjunctive mood as well.

Aura and the Involuntary Memory of Religious Ritual

Religious icons have been objects of ritualistic devotion for much of human civilization, as the wealth of extant iconography attests to. Hence, an analysis of religious art in the form of iconography presents an excellent means of demonstrating my overarching argument. Take, for example, a fifteenth century Madonna and Child sculpture from the Domenico Gaggini (1425–1492).[22] The tiny cracks on the polychromed alabaster immediately

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19 . Adam Seligman, "Ritual and Sincerity: Certitude and the Other," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36, no.1 (2010): 10. I put "better" in quotes because there is no objective criterion to assess any culture's definition of a better model of life.

20. Seligman, Weller, Puett, and Bennett, *Ritual and its Consequences*, 23.

21. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), vii.

22. A series of the Domenico Gaggini Madonna and Child (alternately titled Madonna di Trapani) are preserved at the Berenson Art Collection at Vila I Tatti, Florence, attributed to Edvige Lugaro, "Una Madonna Gaginesca ai Tatti," Paragone, XXXV, 411 (1984): 74–80.

calls for the viewer's reverence for its survival over the centuries, while the astonishingly well-preserved metal crown (presumably gold or gold gilded) demonstrates its recalcitrance to being pilfered (see fig. 1). From certain perceptual framings, this recalcitrance can be interpreted as being rooted in the sacred power of the icon; its ability to protect itself from profanation. Beyond what is signaled by its pristine preservation, the crown also adds sacred value to the idol via the symbolism associated with gold. As Woolgar explains, adorning icons with jewels and other precious metals "was significant, serving not as superficial decoration, but as a contribution to the force of the object" – in other words, such ornamentation was meant to "enhance the power of the holy [object]."[23] Using the terminology introduced above, we can thus say that there is a sacred aura emanating from this well-aged Madonna sculpture, an aura which, as I will argue below, is rooted in a specific type of experiential response.

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23. Woolgar, "What Makes Things Holy," 69.

Figure 1: "Workshop of Gaggini, and Copy after Pisano, Madonna and Child," late fifteenth - early seventeenth century. Alabaster, partly polychromed and gilded with metal crown. Berenson Art Collection, I Tatti - The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:419309699.

The concept of "aura" is first taken up by Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological

Reproducibility" (1939);[24] however, I am primarily interested in utilizing his discussion presented in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939). In the latter essay, Benjamin asserts that an object's aura is rooted in its "prehistory." As he explains, the prehistory of an object gives rise to certain associations that "cluster" around it, and these associations are what "we call […] the aura of an object."[25] Accordingly, when speaking of an object's aura we are not referring to some innate property that it has, but rather to something which is located in our experience of it. Benjamin links the experience of an object's aura to Proust's notion of the involuntary memory (*mémoire involontaire*): "where there is experience [*Erfahrung*] in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine in the memory [*Gedächtnis*] with material from the collective past."[26] In the specific case of religious iconography, I suggest that this involuntary memory is comprised of a combination of the somatic memory of physically partaking in ritualistic behaviors associated with the iconography – if the icon is of Mary, the somatic memory of saying the rosary, for example – and the social memory of seeing or being aware of people participating in such ritualistic behavior.[27] Where the somatic

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24. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Selected Writings 1938–40*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 251–283.
25. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 337–338.
26. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 316.
27. The linking of ritual to the phenomenon of involuntary memory/an object's aura is also in line with Benjamin's assertion that "the earliest artworks originated in the service of rituals – first magical, then religious, and it is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 256) – and, accordingly, that, "rituals, with their ceremonies and festivals […] kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 317).

memory differs from the social memory is that the first is mediated by and originates from one's own corporeality, while the latter is mediated by the mental association of other social bodies practicing such corporeal rituals, now or in the past. Regardless of the level of mediation, the evocation of such memories speaks to the human predisposition towards the subjunctive mode of being. In other words, the auratic shock – the sensation of feeling under the power of the icon – is really the mental process of partaking in the subjunctive mode of being. This partaking, however, isn't necessarily related to holding a religious identification. As the "social" element of the involuntary memory indicates, the aura of religious art – that is to say, its specific prehistory and the associations that accompany it – can invoke memories rooted in our shared social and cultural imaginary, opening up a subjunctive mood that might be unrelated to one's personal/corporeal experiences.

Other scholars have come up with alternative explanations to capture what is described here as the auratic shock. David Morgan, in *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment* (2018), prefers the term "enchantment" over aura, because enchantment for him signifies the way in which "things made by human beings return to them as something *not* humanly produced, something that is as real as they themselves." [28] Elsewhere, Wingfield invokes the South Asian religious practice of *darsan*, which refers to the viewing of a sacred image as a reciprocal experience. In other words, the viewer is also seen by the religious image, and, as a result, is "touched and affected by this contact."[29]

28. David Morgan, *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21.
29. Christopher Wingfield, "Touching the Buddha: Encounters with a Charismatic Object" in *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, ed. Sandra H. Dudley (London: Routledge, 2010), 65.

While I am drawn to Morgan's metaphoric conceptualization of enchantment and sympathetic to Wingfield's notion of humanistic charisma, I believe aura, understood as the involuntary invocation of the somatic and/or social memory of ritual, represents the best theoretical description.

This is because their terminology seems to assert, contra Benjamin, that the aura of religious art is both fixed and innate – that is to say, their terminology seems to locate the aura of religious artwork *in the work of art itself* (i.e., in its "charisma" or some "enchanting" property it has), rather than in the viewer's distinct and variegated *experience of it*. To clarify, while I do not think they are asserting that religious art is animated by some type of sacred essence, I do think that the language of "charisma" and "enchantment" reifies the perception that it is the object itself that causes this intersubjective effect, rather than the idea that it is the frame we bring that effects this type of experience. This, then, is why I believe the terminology of aura-as-involuntary-memory to be superior – it highlights how the cinematic mobility of the viewer represents a crucial component of an artwork's aura. In other words, by locating an object's aura in the viewer's experience of it, it becomes clear how the cinematic mobility of the viewer (as explicated below) creates different perceptual framings which invoke different types of involuntary memories and thus different types of subjunctive moods. I argue that this language is especially preferable when referring to the experience of viewing religious art in the context of the secular museum. Here, religious art exists in assemblages and communities[30] where a collection of sacred imag-

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30. See Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), where he discusses a "religious economy" where religious art and holy sites often must compete with their peers for following and attention.

es and objects compete for the visitor's attention. In such a context it is not some enchanting or charismatic property of the art that invokes the subjunctive mood, but rather the frame applied by the visitor's cinematic mobility.[31]

Cinematic Mobility in the Modern Art Museum

Filmmakers relay the intended narrative of a film through its *mise-en-scène* – the design and composition of the set (including props, actors, costumes, and lighting) – cinematography, and editing. Cinematography is a crucial component, as "how the camera takes in the [mise-en-]scene is how the audience will perceive it."[32] Likewise, Museums relay intended narratives about certain pieces/collections/artists/movements through the curation of exhibits. In other words, by choosing rooms with certain fixtures, moldings, wall coverings, lighting, etc., and by manipulating these features as needed, museum curators create "frames" which encourage visitors to perceive the intended narrative.[33]

In the analogy currently being explicated, the director corresponds to the museum curator, the *mise-en-scène* to the curated exhibit, and the cinematographer to the visitor. While the

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31. It must be made clear that the visitors I am referring to are members of the general public who are viewing these works of art in the contemporary context of the secular museum. In different periods, the art currently on display in these museums would have only been accessible to a small elite group. As this elite group was mainly comprised of art historians and wealthy art collectors/connoisseurs whose viewing experience would have taken place in a much more intimate setting, their viewing experience would be quite different from what I describe below. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the present work to discuss earlier eras.

32. Alain Brown, *Cinematography: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 10.

33. Philip Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10.

mise-en-scène of a film suggests a certain narrative frame, the cinematographer adds another level of framing, which is why, depending on how the cinematographer decides to shoot, the same *mise-en-scène* can tell different stories. Likewise, although a museum exhibit suggests a certain narrative frame, the cinematic mobility of the viewer – their ability to walk through at their own speed, dwell on certain pieces while ignoring others, focus in on a certain aspect of a piece while letting the rest fall into soft focus, view the same piece from different angles, etc. – adds another level of framing, which is why the same curated exhibit can invoke different perceptions from different visitors. In both instances, the movement of the camera/visitor frames the scene.

There is, however, a problem with this analogy: while in the case of a film the cinematographer is establishing a frame to assist an unknown viewer in coming to see the director's vision, in the case of the museum, the visitor-as-cinematographer is establishing a frame for themselves. However, this doesn't mean that the museum visitor is somehow closer to the "reality" of the spectacle than the viewer of a film. In both museum installations and films there is distance between the spectator and spectacle. While in previous eras patrons were able to have a more intimate experience with the art they encountered by touching it,[34] modern day museum goers are not afforded this luxury for obvious reasons related to preservation. The materiality/representation of artwork thus becomes something to be engaged with on a strictly visual level, calling for the viewer to actively exert their gaze and imagination to reach a more organic "grasp" of its materiality/representation through constant mental associations (which can trigger involuntary

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34. As suggested above, the modern-day museum goer's experience is much more mediated than in earlier eras. For a subtle discussion of the term intimacy, see Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 8–14.

memories, both somatic and social). While films have soundtracks and dialogue between characters to stimulate our mental associations and memories, in a museum an on-site curator and ambient noise function in a similar manner to achieve this same goal.

In sum, the cinematic mobility of each visitor is unique, and by engaging with exhibits/individual pieces in different ways – i.e., through different perceptual frames – each visitor can narrativize the same exhibit/piece in different ways. Using the terminology of aura, we can say that different people will experience different auras when encountering the same work of art.[35] This brings us to our next discussion. We will now examine a Renaissance-era work depicting the Madonna and Child as a case study to analyze the effects of cinematic mobility in the production of changing auras.

Cinematic Mobility and the Shifting Auras of "The Madonna and Child"

In "What Is an Apparatus?" (2009), Giorgio Agamben undertakes a "theological genealogy of apparatuses," and comes to define the concept as "literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings."[36] Later on, in his discussion of the apparatuses of conse-

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35. It should be noted that, even in the contemporary context, the perceptual frame of the serious art collector, restoration specialist, curator, etc., is of a different quality than the general visitor, as the former group has not only preexisting knowledge and associations related to the art, but also the luxury of being able to get much closer to the art, perhaps even gaining a tactile sense of its materiality, which adds a layer to the mental associations that can be invoked.

36. See Giorgio Agamben, "What is An Apparatus?," in *What is An Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14.

cration and profanation, he defines the former as that which "designate[s] the exit of things" from "free use and trade among humans," and the latter as "the counter-apparatus that restores to the common use what sacrifice [consecration] had separated and divided."[37]

In the terms of the present discussion, we can say that during the age of the image the consecration of religious art, as discussed above, imbued it with what I have been referring to as a "sacred aura" – that is to say, works of religious art were viewed as a means of entering into the sacred presence of whatever was being depicted (or, put differently, a means of evoking the subjunctive mood). When religious art became deracinated from its original religious context, it underwent a "profanation" in the sense articulated above. While Belting argues that this process of profanation marked the end of the "era of the image" – and thus the end of the "sacred aura" – I argue that the apparatus of the museum and the apparatus of cinematic mobility combine in a way that allows religious art to be framed as both sacred and profane, simultaneously. In other words, while the secular context of the museum suggests a "profane" framing of religious art, the cinematic mobility of the viewer allows for a "sacred" framing.[38]

Take, for example, the Madonna and Child exhibit that can be found at the Stefano Bardini Museum in Florence, Italy (fig. 2). Here, multiple portraits and figures of the Madonna and Child – all of a similar visual prominence – are found juxtaposed on one wall. The objects on display are multiple and diffuse, and, accordingly, compete for the visitor's attention. With each piece coming from a

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37. Agamben, "What is An Apparatus?," 18.
38. I am not, of course, suggesting that every viewer will perceive a sacred aura, but merely that cinematic mobility creates the conditions of possibility for this response in the general viewing public.

different time and place, their assemblage in the secular space of the museum speaks to their deracinated state, and, accordingly, encourages a secular framing: these are valuable pieces of art (i.e., commodities) that have been collected and displayed for their aesthetic and historical value. The fact that they have been deracinated, commodified, collected, and displayed for the enjoyment of the masses makes them prime examples of profanation in the sense articulated above. This framing can be confirmed or denied by the perceptual frame of the viewer, depending on the type of cinematic mobility they employ.

Figure 2: A montage display of various depictions of the Madonna and Child, late fifteenth to early seventeenth century. Sculpted images on wooden plaques. Stefano Bardini Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Florence, Italy. Photo taken by the author on March 7, 2018.

If the visitor walks by without ever fully stopping, the effect is something of a "montage" – what's appreciated is the decorative effect brought about by the juxtaposition of different objects, and

no opportunity is given for the "mute idol to speak."[39] A similar effect is achieved if the visitor does not approach the images closely, but rather views from a distance, something like a "long shot." Long shots "emphasize the space over the character," or the "connection between the character and the space around them."[40] In the secular space of the museum, the long shot thus emphasizes the deracinated state of the objects, and, accordingly, their profanation in the sense articulated above. However, if the viewer stops to dwell on a specific piece, focusing all their attention on it so the rest of the objects fade into a soft focus, the effect is something of a "close-up." As Gustavo Mercado notes in *The Filmmaker's Eye* (2013), "the most important feature of a close-up is that it lets the audience see nuances of a character's behaviour and emotion (especially those that play across the face) that cannot be seen in wider shots […] the closeness and intimacy of a close-up lets audiences connect with a character (and a story) on an emotional level." [41] Likewise, by employing the "close-up," the visitor's experience of a certain piece becomes more intimate: they can focus on the aspects of its materiality/representation which speak to its consecrated prehistory, which can bring up memories and associations (both somatic and social) that make it seem as though the paining "is not mute but capable of speech."[42] The perceptual frame engendered by the "close-up" thus makes it possible to experience the painting as having a sacred aura.

However, as suggested above, the link between cinematic mobility and the triggering of a subjunctive mood extends beyond religious artwork. In other words, non-religious art can also trigger

39. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 156–157.
40. Gustavo Mercado, *The Filmmaker's Eye* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 59.
41. Mercado, *The Filmmaker's Eye*, 35.
42. Belting, *Likeness and Presence,* 261.

the subjunctive mood, depending on the cinematic frame being employed. This assertion will require a bit of unpacking. As David Morgan argues, the cult of the secular icon[43] – a phenomenon widely seen in contemporary fan culture, advertising, political campaigns and eroticism – functions similarly to the cult of the religious icon, in that in each instance, the icon is viewed as a way to "reconnect to the source" – i.e., to the figure being depicted – and "offer renewed access to it."[44] In the terms of the present work, what Morgan seems to be noting is that the human mind seems to be predisposed towards the subjunctive mood when engaging in devotional behavior. However, as I have argued, one doesn't need to be consciously engaging in devotional behavior for the subjunctive mood to be triggered. In other words, the type of cinematic mobility we employ can, to re-quote Turner, help us experience "the antistructural liminality provided in […] aesthetic forms"[45] of all types, an experience which facilities the subjunctive mood. In the terms of aura, we can say that the type of cinematic mobility we employ dictates the type of aura we experience, which can range from the sacred to the profane.

Conclusion

According to the curators at the Stefano Bardini Museum, most of the Renaissance-era Madonna and Child pieces in their collection were collected from destroyed churches or bought from rich families in Tuscany and other parts of Italy. Accordingly, the prehistory of these objects can be framed in either sacred or profane

43. Morgan lists Marilyn Monroe, Che Guevara, John Lennon and Greta Garbo as examples. See Morgan, *Images at Work*, 135.
44. Morgan, *Images at Work*, 135.
45. Turner, *The Ritual Process,* vii.

terms, depending on whether one is focused on their life as consecrated objects or on their life as recovered or pilfered commodities. As argued above, it is the cinematic mobility of the viewer that brings one or the other into focus. In the case of the montage or long shot, what seems to come into focus is the profane life stage of the pieces, as what is emphasized is their deracination and aesthetic value. In the case of the close-up, space is made for the sacred life stage of the pieces – or, put differently, their sacred aura – to come into focus. When this occurs, the portraits appear as the devotional objects they were initially intended to be, and social and somatic memories associated with their devotional use can be triggered. Put differently, the objects come to appear as expressions of the subjunctive mood, which, in turn, may trigger the subjunctive mood in the viewer as well.

Madonna portraits will thus continue producing different auras ranging from the sacred to the profane, depending on the various frames we apply. In all those myriad framings, the minimum requirement from the viewer is respect, a respect that we owe both to the materiality of the portrait and the somatic and social memories it conjures up in its viewers. The presence and absence of such memories and the fluidity of the two remind us of what Charles Taylor describes as the post-secular human condition of our present era, where belief in God becomes "one human possibility among others." [46] Building on Taylor's insight, if there is any justification for a secularist triumphalism, it is not that God has ceased to exist, but rather that we have broken the totalizing control of the church over the subjunctive vision of one civilization and made it possible for a multitude of subjunctive visions to co-exist and flourish.

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46. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

Book Reviews

Playing with J. L. Austin's notion of "speech acts," in which language does something besides just communicating information, Joyce Flueckiger tells us that material also *acts* and *creates* identity, theology, and transformation. With this fascinating book, the author aspires to, using Bruno Latour's words, "make things talk" (13) and bring objects that play a central role in Indic spiritualties into the religious studies fold through an ethnographic-performative methodology. This approach was developed throughout many years of fieldwork across three geographic areas – Chhattisgarh, Hyderabad, and Tirupati. Such a potent combination of ethnographic study with performative analysis seeks to shed light on the unwritten "agency" of things, the capacity they have to act, to cause an effect, and to become vital materiality. This book boldly affirms that agency is not the monopoly of subjects: things can indeed enter into relationships with other objects and humans, called "assemblages" (a term borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's revolutionary work), and they can cause effects and relations that are unpredictable and unprovoked by conscious will or human intention.

Flueckiger takes the reader on an exhilarating journey into the quotidian religiosities of India in which objects become alive in the most unexpected ways. She flawlessly situates herself in India, in its myriad rural towns and at the margins of the ever-expanding megacities, evoking its smells and flavours, the crowds at festivals,

and the infinite pouring of story-tellings opened in a vast multiplicity of languages and worlds. The author's gaze moves from a carved rock at the foot of a sacred mountain whose origins are lost and has acquired a religiosity of its own, to all kinds of ornaments that give the body wearing them unpredictable qualities and powers; from shrines whose local goddesses transform their identities as the city grows in size, to cement statues of what "should" be regarded as a demon (the case of Ravana in the Ramayana's canonical story), and that, unexpectedly – through reversal with multifarious political consequences – become the object of reverence among Chhattisgarhis and Dalits.

Flueckiger aims to elicit the ways in which "Indian cultures are replete with examples of materials that are assumed to cause things to happen or to prevent them from happening," all of which gestures toward "an indigenous theory of the agency of materiality" (5). Although Flueckiger does not provide a final definition, she offers us many examples of what such a theory may look like. She takes her case studies from ordinary daily lives which manifest surprising ways in which materials display some sort of agency that seems unique to these Hindu worlds. Even though material religion has become a field of its own in the last decade, however minor, it nonetheless has been overlooked by most scholars of Hinduism and Indian religions.

In this complex terrain, Flueckiger shows how objects have their own agency beyond the human intention that shaped them in the first place. These materialities are strongly linked to social everyday life and Hindu practice. Western scholars have often privileged the study of texts in India to the detriment of everyday materialities. In recent years, there has been a slow but steady shift from this textual and discursive approach to a more embodied and material one, but as Flueckiger points out, this corrective has been

too anthropocentric, focused more on what materialities reflect of the humans who use them than on the materials themselves. Instead, Flueckiger pushes us to look at the materials for what they *do* or cause people to do, and not only for what they mean to people. Even though after Diana Eck's *Darshan* visual culture studies have turned to the image of deities and their gaze as having their own agentive materiality, Flueckiger has chosen to turn instead to the often neglected presence of the materials, their mere material existence, rather than their visuality.

This book reads like a folklorist detective novel on the hidden life of things and is also generous on theories and methodologies of material religion without ever losing focus on the main "ethnographic passion." The conversations she has with other people become the kernel of the book's structure: they are the primary sources, the lived textuality with which Flueckiger has produced her fantastic scholarship. How religion on the ground is currently lived often disorients scholars and confuses outsiders. Flueckiger makes an art out of this disorientation while participating herself in the worlds she tries to understand, dissolving the old insider/outsider divide. Gods and goddesses live among people, they visit them in dreams, and sometimes they possess their worshippers. A married man wearing a sari during a local festivity may be transformed by the power of that sari into a goddess. We now know after Judith Butler that gender is performative, but what happens when we consider the sari itself as performative? By interrogating performativity in this way, Flueckiger tries to make sense of things amidst these Indic religious worlds looking at the materials themselves, the things that hold those worlds in place (the saris, the statues, the shrines).

The all-pervasive and unwritten Hindu philosophy responsible for this indigenous theory of things interpenetrates

every daily activity and every body which either contains the divine or expresses it. To exist in this framework is to worship or to be worshipped. Every little thing may reveal the ultimate reality, and hence, it is to be ornate, to be made beautiful. The ornaments are called *alankara,* which is a Sanskrit word for poetry, or, more precisely, for what poetry *does.* Beauty is to be cultivated through rituals, festivals, collective practices; most importantly, via objects, guises, and all kinds of ornamentations (bangles, bracelets, necklaces, tattoos, rings), which are meant to not only beautify the body but to protect it against the evil eye. These materialities somehow contain an invisible spiritual power, the *shakti* that was infused in them when they were crafted, or alternatively, their substance may intrinsically possess power such as the gold of jewelry that is thought to have healing properties. In such a world, each material act is the act of the divine's power itself, however, this power is understood in every occasion. Religion here is performative; it enacts the world through the repetition of festivities and the daily rituals of adorning one's body or the stone-body of a god/dess, but it is also political, constantly negotiating the tenuous boundaries between the city and the village, caste and indigenous identities, folk spirituality and canonical religions.

The purpose of this book is thus "to bring materiality to the center of our understanding of everyday Hindu worlds" (161). To do religious studies in the way that Flueckiger does here implies challenging our common understanding of religion and reorienting it, from something that some humans do or believe in toward something that happens and is done within a network of multiple relationships that includes non-human actors. By focusing on everyday materiality as agentive, our theories and methods of religion are necessarily expanded and complicated. This book paves the way for a new perspective into South Asian studies and Indic

religions and it will be of great value for religious studies scholars who are willing to enrich their views and methodologies by decentering the human and giving materiality its relevance in the lived experience of religion.

The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India. Manan Ahmed Asif. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. Pp. 321.
Reviewed by Sabeena Shaikh, *McGill University*

Manan Ahmed Asif's *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* is an ambitious endeavour to trace the genealogy of the concept of Hindustan and to embark on this quest with a decolonial framework of the philosophy of history. Asif contends that the people of the South Asian subcontinent share a common political ancestry in a region once conceived as a multicultural "Hindustan." This notion was subsequently elided by a European understanding of a religiously-partitioned land called "India" which endures today. As his key methodological ideology, Asif takes the intellectual agendas of pre-colonial, non-European pasts seriously and focuses on a seventeenth century Deccan historian by the name of Muhammad Qasim Firishta. *Tarikh-i Firishta (The History of Firishta)*, Asif argues, is the first formulaic history of Hindustan. Firishta's work was a cornerstone for the formation of Europe's philosophy of history, a staple in the colonial knowledge project, and crucial for the transition from Hindustan to British India. This transition is the nefarious result of epistemic violence that colonialism imposes on the colonized through the ordering and reordering of knowledge, and it is precisely this narrative that Asif recounts in *The Loss of Hindustan.*

Asif intentionally displaces colonial temporal and epistemic frameworks by organizing his book thematically as opposed to chronologically. His study asserts three main points. First, there is a rich archive of pre-European historiography in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, and "from the eleventh century onward, this Hindustani network of scholars produced a cohesive account of their world and their past" (59). Second, the encounter between the

Arab world and Hindustan and between Hindus and Muslims consisted of "a preponderance of amity based on notions of mutually recognizable good" and intellectual exchange (48). Third, Europeans usurped Hindustani historiography to re-conceptualize global intellectual history, to reimagine land and property, and to propagate an imperial agenda which make impossible the "act of accessing a precolonial history of Hindustan without going through the intellectual edifice created by British India and its histories of the subcontinent" (64).

Asif's genealogy begins in the rich archive of pre-European historical writings of Hindustan, in which historians stressed the cultivation of personal ethics in order to think about the political world. He parses copious amounts of manuscripts and literary works between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries to defend the existence of a rich intellectual geography that "encompasses the network of texts, citational practices, archives, schools, royal patronage, and scholarly communities […] embedded in institutions that cohere across political systems and for generations" (55). Far from a dry archive of exclusive histories, Asif imbues his narrative with poetry, epics, romances, and correspondences, which prompt the reader to question what materials constitute a history. Most prominently they include "Baihaqi (d. 1040), Juzjani (d. 1260), Barani (d. 1367), Mir Khwand (d. 1498), Nizamuddin (d. 1594), and Abu'l Fazl (d. 1602), alongside epics and histories in Sanskrit such as the *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharata,* Ratnakara's *Haravijaya, and* Kalhana's *Rajatrarangani*" (65). Contrary to the conclusions of colonial translators, Asif perceives "a coherent inter-referentiality, a clear sense of development of a theory and a practice of doing history and deliberate ways in which the logic of history is made apparent to future generations" (86).

Firishta's work lies at the intersection of pre-European and colonial historiography. Firishta aimed to produce a novel mode for historical thinking by writing the first comprehensive history of Hindustan. *Tarikh-i Firishta* "reflected a long genealogy of historians interested in the practice and ethics of history writing" including "histories of the places and peoples of Hindustan" (101). His references from poetry, inscriptions, and histories reflect the ethical and spiritual responsibility of rulers towards subjects of various belief systems, one in which Brahmanical astrology and Sufi prophecy coexist (136) and one in which "we see Hindustan as an eminently hospitable space — heavenly— with excellent weather, climate, access through water to the hinterland, and political structures that were already open and accommodating to a diverse population" (145). The enlightened picture Asif paints of Firishta's history is comparable to the cosmopolitanism stressed in Rajeev Kinra's work on the Mughal court historian Chander Bhan Brahman in *Writing Self, Writing Empire*. Here too, the factional and socially insular image of hegemonic Muslim invaders is refuted by a self-referential author with a meta-awareness of an ethics of belonging and a corrective foresight for posterity. Interestingly, both Chandar Bhan and Firishta were intent on reconciling Muslim rulers within the chronology of the continuously unfolding time of the *Mahabharata*, highlighting the contrapuntally intertwined genealogy of places and people in Hindustan which were neither Hindu nor Muslim. Both Kinra and Asif recognize that Hindustani historians shaped early British colonial understandings of administration, geography, and social norms in India which reinforced their imperial goals.

The effects of historical colonization are most obvious by the hijacking of indigenous languages in translation projects where "the colonial episteme collected, archived, organized, and excerpt-

ed textual and material forms to create histories of India" that robbed the colonized of the agency to represent their past in categories different from what the imperial archive created (5). For Asif, this is epitomized by the work of "soldier-scribes" like Alexander Dow and William Jones who operationalized texts in order to legitimize colonialism. Dow's *History of Hindostan,* which began as a "translation project" of Firishta's history, was simply a carrier text for the dissertations and policy papers appended to it. As Asif articulates, "in doing so, Dow also manufactured the formal project for writing British India—isolating the Muslim despot, segmenting Persian histories as source materials for the story of decay and conquest, and constructing the political intervention of the soldier-scribe in the conquest of knowledge about Hindustan" (198). Inspired by Dow's *History of Hindostan*, Hegel, Voltaire, Kant and others theorized a philosophy of history and the social scientific disciplinary truths within the field of philology. Ultimately, this allowed for the exploration of intellectual history as a whole and a reimagining of land and property not only in Bengal, but for colonies in the Americas too.

Asif asserts that the re-writing of Hindustani history in colonial terms created ethnic and religious division. Central to this division was the "linking of *India* with the Vedic past coincided with the linking of *Hindustan* with the 'Muslim' despotic political regimes" (33). This paradigm signifies the term "India" as indigenous, ancient, and most importantly, antagonistic to the "Hindustan" of Muslim rulers. It allows the colonizer to establish a timeless, suspended Hindu history which effectively primitivizes the populace and leads to a political forgetting or erasure through universalist inclusion. Therefore, the colonizer creates a distorted chronicle of discord to justify a sustained presence as a conciliatory intermediary between two quarreling factions. In effect, it is a

manipulation of the Hindustani histories, especially Firishta's, for the purposes of building an empire.

Asif begins and ends his monograph with the twentieth century and present-day ramifications of the transformation of Hindustan into India. After 1857, despite the efforts of intellectuals like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Shibli Nu'mani, and Abdul Halim Sharar to popularize the Muslim past, nationalists favored communal allegiances which led to the creation of India and Pakistan. Asif's juxtaposition of Iqbal and Savarkar's poetry in the first chapter is a metaphorical premonition of the "slow evolution in the idea of a Hindustan from an exemplary and inclusive space to a multi-political federation" that the book traces (9). Asif relativizes his historical project by indicating that "after partition, the postcolonial states of Pakistan and India continued their progress toward majoritarian hegemonic ideas," which are evident in the ever-present persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan and the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party in India.

Like his first book, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (2016), one can sense the weight of responsibility and simultaneous quest for belonging that Asif imbues in his words. While his first book challenged the origin story of Islam in the subcontinent, this book is a history of Muslim belonging which reconstructs the archive of Persian histories to paint a picture of pre-European cohabitation. If there is something lacking in this impressive work, it is perhaps the inadequate discussion of the gendered dimension of the colonial narrative project which centralized sexual excesses and social depravity as a justification for reform in the nineteenth century. Additionally, the asynchronous organization of the book holds true to his decolonial methodology, but his narrative is often difficult to follow especially because the breadth and depth of his research spans several

centuries. Nevertheless, *The Loss of Hindustan* is a model in the ethics of writing history for future intellectual projects and a reminder to recognize the ways in which the past continues to formulate how our current prejudices are articulated. Asif's work is a treasure trove of bibliographic resources for the interested student and an indispensable work in the field of global intellectual history.

New Islamic Urbanism: The Architecture of Public and Private Space in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Stefan Maneval. London: UCL Press, 2019. Pp. 242.
Reviewed by Fawaz Abdul Salam, *McGill University*

Over the last few decades, the spatial turn in the social sciences has succeeded in bringing more nuance into the study of the everyday Muslim lifeworld. The scholars leading this turn have been especially critical of earlier approaches to the study of Muslim societies, and this criticism has resulted in the problematization of essentialized and gendered notions of the "Islamic City" – notions which have characterized men as dominating the public sphere and women as being subjugated and marginalized to the private sphere by religious norms and patriarchal social orders. Stefan Maneval's *New Islamic Urbanism: The Architecture of Public and Private Space in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia* is an important contribution to the ongoing examination of the entanglement between gendered public and private spaces in Jeddah during the twentieth century. Arguing against the normative Western assumption that gender segregation in Muslim societies produces distinctively gendered public and private spaces, this study asserts that varying notions of privacy in different cultural contexts produces public and private spaces that are intertwined, where the private space often plays a significant role in the constitution of active publics.

With the kingdom of Saudi Arabia currently undergoing sweeping social and cultural reform under the initiation of crown prince Muhammad bin Salman, Maneval's work is particularly timely. Although Salman is a controversial figure due to his silencing and arresting of political dissidents, he has been applauded for abolishing Saudi Arabia's strict gender segregation, a move which has encouraged women's participation in public spaces. While acknowledging the impact of these recent changes, Maneval

does observe that gender segregation is still supported by a large section of the Saudi population, and, accordingly, draws attention to how the broader discourse of publicness and privacy and the idea of gender segregation is mediated by religious discourses, everyday social practices, and material culture. Although it is an undeniable fact that strict public morals and norms produce gender inequality and exclusion in the country, Maneval challenges the popular claim that men are the only ones who take advantage of it. Instead, by taking both men's and women's perspectives, the study illustrates how gender segregation and the changing notion of privacy limit the movements of both men and women within a particular architectural assemblage of the city.

Maneval uses various archival sources and fieldwork methods to reconstruct Jeddah's social history in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, exploring the interaction between "architecture, human bodies, [and] social practice and discourse" (13) in constituting both public and private spaces in the city. Theoretically, his study is informed by recent interventions in spatial studies offered by scholars such as Martina Low and Doreen Massey, both of whom stress the discursive formation of social spaces. This approach helps Maneval question the fixed notion of male public and female private spaces and points him toward the relational nature of how these spaces are constituted within a given cultural context. Theoretical insights are also drawn from Gilles Deleuze's theory of assemblage and Heike Delitz's studies in architectural sociology as a means of exploring the city's changing architectural assemblage and the forms of social practices and spaces that emerge out of it.

The first chapter traces how Jeddah – an important port city for the passage of Muslim *hajj* pilgrims to the holy city of Mecca – contributed to the urban development of the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chapter two takes the reader on a visual tour of the old city with the help of photographs. Here, Maneval describes the physical topography and residential architecture of the old city, as well as the social spaces and the kind of publics that were constituted. By examining the architecture of residential houses, streets, and marketspaces and different social classes and ethnicities of the people who occupied them, Maneval argues that during the first half of the twentieth century, "the architecture in Jeddah did not provide fixed boundaries between public outdoor and private interior spaces but helped in the constitution of gendered publics both inside and outside the home" (41). For example, in traditional two-floored residences, men carried out business or provided accommodation for pilgrims on the ground floor, while the upper floor was restricted for family activities. Here, the female members of a joint family or friends from the neighborhood socialized, constituting an active public by organizing social gatherings to celebrate festivities, discuss family affairs, and other events. Similarly, during the *hajj* pilgrimage season, while many men worked in Mecca as traders and guides for pilgrims, women accessed the public spaces and organized public carnivals, revealing that gender segregation did not produce a permanent and distinctive space for men and women. Chapter two ends with two theoretical reflections: first, it is essential to look at how spaces are the product of social practices mediated by people and material culture; and second, to look at how gender segregation is informed by the notion of privacy and local concepts in Arab Islamic culture.

Chapter three demonstrates the profound changes in Jeddah's built environment enabled by the wealth brought by the discovery of oil. During the pre-oil era, residential architecture fulfilled different functions, such as the reception of guests, accommodation for pilgrims, and other social gatherings. However, new building materials and innovations in construction techniques during the oil era altered the materiality of public and private spaces, resulting in spatial differentiation and polarization. The new residential architecture that flourished during this period promoted a new concept of privacy, where home "became a more family-oriented, intimate, and female space" (107), and commercial, educational, and recreational activities were moved to external places. Additionally, an increase in the number of cars and the construction of wide motorways significantly changed the city's pre-oil era spatiality and sociality, reducing human interactions in public.

In the 1980s, many native urban planners, academics, and architects started to criticize the urbanism of the 1960s and 1970s for disregarding the traditional principles of neighborhood sociality as well as the Islamic notion of privacy. Navigating through the work of the various architects and town planners of this era, Maneval observes the formation of a new urban discourse in Jeddah called "New Islamic Urbanism." In chapter four, he argues that the emergence of this discourse has to be understood within the context of the broader discourse of Salafi revivalism that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, known as *al-sahwa al-Isamiyah.* Salafi scholars and reformers criticized the Saudi government for the increasing influence of Westernization, materialism, and individualism. Although the proponents of the *sahwa* movement and New Islamic Urbanism agreed upon the negative impacts of Westernization, the former advocated for reviving the Islamic teachings of the early

Muslim period while the latter advanced the concept of an Islamic city with reference to the old city of Jeddah.

Chapters five and six look at the impact of the discourse of New Islamic Urbanism on the everyday practices and material culture of Jeddah over the last few decades. While the residential architecture developed since the 1980s has increasingly focused on privacy protection as a means of supporting a pious lifestyle, this trend is also accepted by people who do not follow the conservative religious lifestyle advocated by Salafi reformers, as the new notion of privacy also stresses the importance of individual freedom and restricts outsiders' indulgence in personal spaces. Such a notion of privacy has also led to the flourishing of private cultural enclaves that host events that are usually not allowed in public spaces. These enclaves also often constitute a counter-public by providing shelter to marginalized groups such as political dissidents, those banned by religious groups, and LGBTQ+ people.

Two concepts that gained importance with the rise of New Islamic Urbanism discourse are the avoidance of *khalwa,* the presence of unrelated males and females in secluded spaces, and *ikhtilat,* the mixing of unrelated males and females in open spaces like cafés, restaurants, and shopping malls. While the majority tend to follow the segregation informed by these concepts, many others challenge them by the duplication of the private realm in public spaces. For example, a moving car with tinted windows provides a secluded space for challenging the dominant moral conduct in public. Additionally, the hosting of mixed art exhibitions, flash mobs, and other social events in shopping malls, cafés, and other public spaces contribute to the subtle expressions of counter publics, which resist the constraints put by religious police as well as the Saudi state.

While discussing the response to the discourse of New Islamic Urbanism, the study primarily focuses on Saudi citizens and Arabs from other countries in the Middle East. Little attention is paid to the experience of middle-class immigrants from South and Southeast Asia who comprise an important part of the population of Jeddah. The last two chapters would have been enriched by exploring the immigrants' perceived notions of privacy and publicness and how they are negotiated within the city's changing architectural assemblage.

That said, Maneval's study is helpful in understanding how urban spaces and spatial practices in Muslim societies are shaped by religious discourses and changing material culture. The book contributes to research on the transformation of public spheres and spaces in Muslim societies. It will also generate interest in both scholars and students examining the changing architectural assemblages of cities and everyday urban practices in the Middle East.

Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism. Mana Kia. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020. Pp. xxiv + 371
Reviewed by Behzad Borhan, *McGill University*

Books begin with their titles. For me, the first task is to translate the title into Persian. I ask myself, "What do 'we' call it in Persian?" For *Persianate Selves*, this is not an easy translation. The adjective "Persianate" delineates a more expansive meaning than the term "Persian," and no word in the Persian language can stand solidly as an equivalent for it. This comprehensive meaning of Persian is what Mana Kia investigates in this book. Let me explain with a personal example. That I speak of "we Persians" comes from the fact that I was born from Persian parents in Iran and grew up speaking Persian. Based on the understanding of modern nationalism about ethnicity, territory, and language, I call myself a Persian. But was it the case for people before the rise of modern nationalism? Kia's argument serves to show that it was not. Not everyone who lived in Iran was Persian, nor was Persian ethnicity based only on blood and lineage, nor were "native" Persian speakers the only people considered to be Persian.

Mana Kia reconceptualizes the meaning of origin and place for being Persian by focusing on people who lived in Iran and Hindustan in the eighteenth century. The book's temporal focus spans between two critical events: the fall of Safavid in 1722 and the production of Macaulay's famous memorandum "Minute Upon Indian Education" in 1835. The former is critical because it defined the shared meaning of place and origin and brought about the construction of our modern idea of Iran, while the latter is critical since it abolished Persian as the language of power in the subcontinent and thus transformed those shared meanings (20).

To represent particular cultural and social aspects of Iran and Hindustan's specific eras, Kia has thoughtfully selected her archival resources from three intertwined generations. She called them commemorative texts. For accessing the memoirs of Safavid times, Kia singled out authors such as Muhammad ʿAlī Hazīn Lāhījī (d. 1766 CE/1180 AH) and Vālih Dāghistānī (d. 1756/1169) as the first generation. For the next generation and for accessing accounts about Nadir Shah's era, she mostly focused on the works of Lutf ʿAlī Āzar Baygdilī (d. 1780/1195) and ʿAbd al-Karīm Kashmīrī (d. 1784/1198). And for the third generation and for accessing memoirs of those who fled the Iranian domain after the fall of Safavid, she picked scholars such as ʾAbu Ṭalib Khan Isfahanī (d. 1806/1220) and ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Shushtarī (d. 1806/1220).

These *adib*s, as the exemplar of people from different geographical places and lineages, are all Persians, according to Kia. She argues that their geographical places constituted their lineage, but only as one part of it. Other types of places, such as ancestral homeland, site of study, or professional location, were more significant (104). Kia sees the diversity between these different groups of people as not categorical but more aporetic (as Derrida formulates it). Instead of focusing on what elements were making the Persian self, she focuses on how these elements were doing so.

The key for Kia is *adab*. It is through Persianate *adab* that lineage, place, and language gained meaning for people to identify themselves as Persians. *Adab* is how Persians identify themselves. Kia applies *adab* in different yet coherent ways throughout the book; all contribute to the fully functioning nature of the term *adab*. She defines *adab* as the proper aesthetic and ethical forms of thinking, acting, and speaking, such that perceiving, desiring, and experiencing *adab* provides the coherent logic of being Persian. Through *adab,* space turns into place, and place obtains a moral

meaning (96). It is also through *adab* that relations between selves and collectives become intelligible, lineage is understood, and language is used (100–102). *Adab* regulates an understanding of kinship distinct from blood and situates Persians ontologically in a world of relationships (200).

Although the multifarious arguments of *Persianate Selves* are chiefly serving the idea of being Persian, the book also offers a novel approach to Persian biographical literature (*tazkira*). Kia traces a conventional method/structure of remembering the past between the authors of commemorative texts. These texts were supposed to tell a story of worthy lives. Still, the very act of the author's selecting and narrating was meaningful, as it was a means of affiliation, allowing the author to identify themselves. Biographers represent certain pasts and certain individuals in a specific way within which their lineages and social relationships are nested.

Given the book's scope, Kia has managed to develop and justify her argument and excellently reincarnate the term *adab*. Throughout the book, she introduces some new terms and resurrects many others (e.g., Turan and Hindustan), all aligned with her idea of "naming" offered in Chapter 6. All in all, Kia's novel insights and approaches locate the *Persianate Selves* among the books that will stay *mana* (endure) in the field of Persianate Studies.

Avicenna and the Aristotelian Left. Ernst Bloch. Translated by Loren Goldman and Peter Thompson. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. Pp. xxvi + 109.
Reviewed by Tapji Garba, *York University*

What is matter? Is it acted upon by other forces or does it have its own laws of motion? Can matter give rise to subjectivity? Materialism is a hot topic in contemporary philosophy and religious studies, with contending positions ranging from new materialism to eliminativism to various forms of speculative realism. The English translation of Ernst Bloch's 1952 monograph *Avicenna und die Aristotelische Linke*[1] (*Avicenna and the Aristotelian Left*) is a well-timed event, serving as Bloch's intervention into an earlier iteration of contemporary debates as well as offering "an unsurpassed précis of Bloch's own speculative materialism" (xi). Here, Bloch argues for a materialist interpretation of Aristotle, one that he finds decisively developed in the work of medieval Islamic philosopher Avicenna. This interpretation serves as the basis for a left-wing Aristotelianism that Bloch also finds in the works of Averroes, Avicebron, Giordano Bruno, Baruch Spinoza, and Karl Marx. At the heart of this tradition is an emphasis on the self-actualizing capacities of matter (15–16).

Unpacking Avicenna's own metaphysics takes up a considerable portion of the book. Bloch identifies three main points of interest regarding Avicenna's interpretation of Aristotle: (1) the relationship between body and self, (2) the relationship between individual understanding and universal reason, and (3) the logical relationship between matter and form. It is the matter-form relation

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1. For the original publication, see Ernst Bloch, *Avicenna und die Aristotelische Linke* (Berlin: Rütten and Loening, 1952).

that most captures Bloch's attention. For Aristotle, every created thing is a composition of matter and form; matter – as indeterminate and unformed – is potentiality. As potentiality, matter is passive and *only* passes into actuality when combined with form (20). Although Avicenna follows Aristotle in making a distinction between matter-as-passive and form-as-active, this distinction becomes something different in his hands. Instead of emphasizing matter's actualization by active-form (otherwise known as the "unmoved mover" or God), Avicenna argues that form is latent within matter itself, and that God is that which sets matter's self-actualizing capacities into motion (21). For Bloch, this move marks Avicenna's radicalization of Aristotle, as he "sharpens the Aristotelian doctrine of uncreated matter" (21) by making matter, like form, an eternal essence. Avicenna's interpretation and development of Aristotle marks the consolidation of the Aristotelian Left by systematically articulating the active capacities of matter.

What makes this a specifically leftist tendency is that the affirmation of matter's intrinsic capabilities and integrity undermines the need to appeal to divine (or creatural) authority. This position is juxtaposed with what Bloch calls the Aristotelian Right, an alternative interpretation of Aristotle represented by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas draws a strong distinction between matter and form, rendering matter passive and form active to a degree beyond Aristotle himself (24–25). Where the Aristotelian Left emphasizes God's role as the immanent cause of matter's self-movement, the Aristotelian Right focuses on the activity of divine transcendence. Although Aquinas argues that matter has intrinsic causal powers, its self-actualizing capacities are "an exclusive gift of the *divine* Act-Being" (27).

The distinction between left and right versions of Aristotelianism is where Bloch's own understanding of historical

materialism becomes apparent, as he argues that the philosophical differences between the two traditions correspond to different socio-political conditions. According to Bloch's reading, Avicenna's interest in the material world's laws of motion is linked to the scientific, technological, and political-economic sophistication of the society in which he lived. For Bloch, Islamic society "despite its feudal forms and its spiritual wars, was organized according to a different principle than that of medieval Europe," a principle which rendered it a prototype of modern bourgeois society with its "global merchants" and "blossoming manufacturing sector" (3–4). On the other hand, Aquinas' philosophical position corresponds to the hierarchical order of "feudal-clerical class society and its ideology" (24). The hierarchical order of feudal-clerical society runs from the fields to the heavens. These connections between the political and the speculative-metaphysical are one of the most original yet subtle points in the book. While the argument that social relations are intrinsically related to forms of thought is already present in Marx, what is unique about Bloch is the way he reads the speculative medieval theological-philosophical discourses through the lens of a historical materialist method in a way that is generative for contemporary scholarship in both political theology and philosophy of religion.

In the final sections of the text, Bloch discusses the ways that Avicenna's insights are further developed in the wake of the Copernican revolution. The displacement of the Ptolemaic system dissolved the remaining traces of the form-matter hierarchy in medieval Aristotelianism, and made it possible to conceive of the universe as "completely realized matter-potentiality" (40). Despite talking about Hobbes, Spinoza, and Bruno, Bloch has little to say about Marx himself (aside from a quote from *The Holy Family*). It

would have been interesting to see a fuller discussion of Marx as a member of the modern Aristotelian Left, especially given Marx's own proclivities towards Aristotle. Such a move could also open an inquiry into whether it is possible to situate Marx within a larger Jewish-Islamic intellectual tradition. But even with few references to Marx, this is a very exciting translation, one that has the potential to animate discussions across the critical humanities.

Of Immediate Apperception. Maine de Biran. Edited by Alessandra Aloisi and Marco Piazza. Translated by Mark Sinclair. London: Bloomsbury, 2020. Pp. viii + 176
Reviewed by A. J. Smith, *McGill University*

Maine de Biran (1766–1824) holds an usual place in the history of philosophy. On the one hand, Biran exercised substantial influence on the intellectual discussions of his day, corresponding at length with important French intellectual figures such as the natural scientist André-Marie Ampere (1775–1836). He was among the first French philosophers to read and interpret Immanuel Kant, so he is an important figure in the French reception of German idealism. Although little of his work was published in his lifetime, he was nonetheless a founder of the French spiritualism tradition, a movement which foregrounds questions of the mind (*l'esprit*) that included some of the most important French philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Victor Cousin (1792–1867), Félix Ravaisson (1813–1900), and Henri Bergson (1859–1941). For his resonances with German idealism, Hippolyte Taine described Maine de Biran as "un Fichte français."[1] In his own overview of French philosophy, Henri Bergson mused that with Biran's project "on peut se demander si la voie que ce philosophe a ouverte n'est pas celle où la métaphysique devra marcher définitivement."[2] Michel Henry, a French phenomenologist who wrote a study on Biran, considered him to be "that prince of thought, who merits being regarded by us in the same way as Descartes and

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1. Hippolyte Taine, *Les Philosophes classiques du XIXe siècle en France* (Paris: Librairie de L. Hachette et Cie, 1868), 61.
2. Henri Bergson, "La philosophie française," *La Revue de Paris* (May 15, 1915): 12.

Husserl, as one of the true founders of a phenomenological science of human reality."[3]

On the other hand, Biran's work is essentially unknown among English-speaking readers. F. C. T. Moore described Biran as "an author almost without critics, indeed almost without readers in the English philosophical tradition."[4] If he is known at all, it is only as a transitional figure on the way to more important and interesting avenues that would only later come to fruition. Because he is seen as a transitional figure, Biran has been characterized as many things in English scholarship: an empiricist, a proto-phenomenologist, or a Neoplatonist, depending on the agenda of the interpreter. None of these characterizations are entirely wrong, as Biran adopts versions of these positions at various stages in his career. The mistake is to take one of these stages in Biran's perpetual philosophical development as if it were the whole of his thought. Biran wrote and rewrote many books, and few were published in his lifetime, almost always because he was unsatisfied with their presentation or the quality of his own argumentation. For this reason, Henri Gouhier somewhat sardonically quipped that "Maine de Biran est l'homme d'un seul livre, et, ce livre, il ne l'a jamais écrit."[5] Regardless of his conversation partner or the stage of his own intellectual development, Maine de Biran nevertheless maintained a singular focus on the fundamental nature of the mind and on developing a metaphysics capable of comprehending this nature. The translation *Of Immediate Apperception* offered by Mark

3. Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 8.
4. F. C. T. Moore, *The Psychology of Maine de Biran* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 2.
5. Henri Gouhier, *Les Conversions de Maine de Biran* (Paris: Libraire philosophique J. Vrin, 1947), 6.

Sinclair is very significant, as it is the first major work of Biran to be published in English. Compared to other examples of his work, it is a succinct and detailed account of Biran's mature position on the nature of the mind, and features the versions of his positions that proved the most influential and decisive in subsequent development of French thought. This translation by Mark Sinclair therefore gives English-speaking readers an opportunity to appraise Biran's ideas and influence on their own terms, and in their own philosophical context.

Biran's philosophy principally involves the development of a new philosophical method, so it sets itself against the form of empiricism that dominated eighteenth century French thought. The first section of the book begins with a recounting of Biran's philosophical context. Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, a figurehead of the empiricist tradition in France, published his influential *Le Traité des sensations* in 1754. Therein, Biran recounts, Condillac radicalizes Locke's empiricism and argues that all knowledge, even the subject's own psychological self-knowledge, is derived from the reception of empirical sense data. Biran does not think that this empirical method, as discussed by Francis Bacon, is mistaken per se. He does, however, think that empiricism as a method is erroneously applied when used to understand the fundamental nature of consciousness: "Without rejecting the validity of that same method [Bacon's], but with regard to a sort of wholly internal experience, different to that which has constantly guided Bacon's disciplines […] one would thereby be led to wonder whether Bacon's method, recommended by so much success in the physical sciences, can reach even the outer limits of a genuinely first philosophy" (28–29). Put briefly, Biran's principal thesis is that wholly internal experiences are of a qualitatively different nature than external ones and produce a different sort of evidence (which

he calls "internal facts"). A different sort of method is required to adjudicate this evidence so that the nature of the mind can be correctly analyzed at its most fundamental level.

For Biran, the main problem with empiricism is that it can only come to grips with the intuited effects or results of the mind's actions, and not the original source of these effects. Biran calls this original knowledge of the mind's action "immediate apperception." This is related to the term coined by Leibniz to refer to the representative or reflective knowledge of the inner states of consciousness. Biran is not interested in knowledge acquired through reflection, but in the kind of original knowledge we have of the inner states of the mind that both precede and make reflection possible. This original knowledge is not perceived in a way that is mediated or empirical; instead, it is coterminous with psychic acts themselves. Biran writes, "perception is different to intuition, as a cause is different to its effect, or as the act itself, immediately apperceived in its free determination, is distinct from its result, mediately perceived, or represented outside of the subject or without any consciousness of productive force" (163). What Biran strives to explain, in other words, is the mind's activity in terms of its source. To illustrate our immediate apperceptive capacity, Biran refers to our sense of bodily motility. When we make use of a limb, say, we first have to bring about the virtual desire of our will into actual movement. While we feel the actual movement of our limbs passively, we are certainly aware of the difference between when we ourselves direct our limbs compared to when someone else moves them for us. The distinction, Biran maintains, is in the sense of effort that supervenes between our psychic will to bring a movement about and the resistance encountered in engaging our body in some kind of movement. This sense or feeling of resistance, according to Biran, is immediate internal apperception (130).

There is much to commend in this translation and little to fault with it. It bridges a significant gap in English-speaking scholarship on French philosophy. This scholarly gap is especially egregious given Biran's persistence in, and influence on, the development of twentieth century French philosophy, in particular issues around a phenomenology of the body in thinkers such as Henri Bergson, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The only issue with this volume is found in its otherwise informative introduction, specifically in its narration of Biran's place in these twentieth century debates in French phenomenology. The authors of this introduction, Alessandra Aloisi and Marco Piazza, contend that Michel Henry's reading of Biran is based on Merleau-Ponty's work because it comes later (17). In actuality, Michel Henry's work on Maine de Biran dates to the same period as Merleau-Ponty's lectures on Biran in terms of its composition (ca. 1948), even though it was not published until 1965. This minor complaint of historical characterization, however, cannot dampen my enthusiasm about this volume, and the attendant hope that this is not the last volume of Biran's sizable oeuvre that will appear in English by this translation and editorial team.

The Power of Resurrection: Foucault, Discipline, and Early Christian Resistance. Patrick G. Stefan. New York: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019. Pp. 298
Reviewed by Derrick Peterson, *University of Texas at Dallas*

The swift rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire remains something of a mystery, even given new historical methods and approaches.[1] The enigma is only increased when we realize the spread was perpetuated under the sign of a crucified criminal. We all too often forget just how truly abhorrent crucifixion was. As now, here at our far end of history, the symbol of the crucifix appears everywhere, on Bibles, lunchboxes, jewelry, tattoos, a dead metaphor no matter how reverently held. But, as Martin Hengel ably reminds us, crucifixion was not merely a manner of execution, but was rather for "breaking the will of conquered peoples."[2] It was

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1. See Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (New York: Harper One, 2011); *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997); *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: Harper One, 2007). These three works by Rodney Stark introduced statistical and sociological analysis that, while at a popular level, proved to display some unique (albeit not uncontested) conclusions about early Christian success. For a summary of Stark in comparison with other attempts at understanding Christian origins, see the brief work of Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise of Christianity Through the Eyes of Gibbon, Harnack, and Rodney Stark* (Netherlands: University of Groningen Press, 2010). For an effective "history of ideas" approach, see the recent study by Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), which throttles back on the assumed speed by which Christianity spread, and focuses on the success of the movement by way of the Christian virtue of patience.
2. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 46. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and*

a gruesome spectacle, one whose instruments pierced bodies, to be sure, but also souls. It is even more remarkable then that such atrocities were, to use Friedrich Nietzsche's terminology, "transvalued" for the sake of the Christian gospel. Intrepid academics brave enough to tackle the initial spread of Christianity as their topic not only have to explain how and why this marginal sect of Judaism flourished, but at the same time locate its triumph by way of the very mechanism meant to quell such multiplication at all. All of this is quite apart from the equally hoary questions surrounding the historicity of Christ's resurrection, Jesus' divinity, self-understanding, the nature of the incarnation to the Trinity, and the litany of other questions leading up through pro-Nicene agreements and beyond.[3]

To coordinate Christian origins with the cross, at any rate, is the sizeable task Patrick G. Stefan has set for himself in his book *The Power of Resurrection.* Resurrection did not simply speak against Roman power and injustice, it undermined it by reversing the judgment so horrifically (and quite literally) pinned to Jesus, doing so by subtly "embedding that subversive critique into the ways by which Christians moved throughout the empire" (11). To the great commission given by Matthew, for example, we must also understand that "the counter-imperial complications of the resurrection of Jesus' body became instantiated in material and

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Criticism of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), who rightly and at length chastises modern theologians for being too susceptible to the anesthetized and anemic force of the cross.

3. Though Stefan rightly brackets these other theological issues, two particularly good monographs on Christ's resurrection were recently published that prove themselves excellent companions to the present volume under review. See Dale Allison Jr., *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021); Matthew Levering, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? Historical and Theological Reflections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

social forms and thereby shaped the lived existence of early Christians through it" (13). [4]

Stefan's work is not unique in its focus upon Christ's apocalyptic confrontation with the powers on the cross, or the vindication of resurrection that leads to Christian resistance against empire. Indeed, that Christianity offered up political critiques of the Roman empire has itself become something of a cliché in biblical studies to the extent that many have rightly called for a moratorium on such talk until stricter methodological guidelines have been implemented. [5] Stefan is totally aware of this, and cites an extensive list of literature. In fact, far from unearthing some secret in pointing to resurrection, he notes that "resurrection naturally lends itself to a counter-imperial message," precisely because it has taken death away as the prime Roman tool of submission, but also has pronounced a reversal of Rome's declaration that Christ was a criminal whose place was mere sport for crows outside the city gates. The specific contribution he hopes to make is, rather, *how* resurrection functions as a subversive idea. "Foundational to my thesis is the claim that previous scholarship has merely declared resurrection to be subversive without a substantive explanation of how an idea can subvert a living emperor" (36–37). For example, specifically targeting N. T. Wright, he notes that "his 817-page tome on the resurrection of Jesus [...] repetitiously makes the point *that* the resurrection declares Jesus as Lord and implies that Caesar is

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4. In addition to the more theological questions regarding, say, incarnation, Stefan also brackets the so-called "Bauer-Ehrman Thesis," regarding the movement from a (supposedly) legitimate Christian pluralism into the narrowness of a newly defined "Orthodoxy" marked out by a power grab (be it through Constantine, or some other manner).

5. Christopher Heilig, *Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for a Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

not, [but] never reveals *why* it is a subversive message or *how* this statement of belief works subversively" (33).

In other words, instead of introducing new data into the field of early Christian studies, Stefan wants rather to be able to view and organize it in a new and hitherto unimagined way to bring neglected elements to the fore. To unpack the mechanism of the *why* and the *how* he finds so wanting in other scholarship, then, Stefan turns – perhaps unexpectedly – to the work of philosopher Michel Foucault. In particular, what is utilized is the philosopher's complex and often misunderstood notions of power, subversion, imitation, and the like, which follows a chapter on the notion of empire and resurrection in Paul. As such, in turning to Foucault's analysis of power distribution, Stefan argues that "Foucault's complex description of the ways by which underlying disciplinary mechanisms," helps us understand "the successful spread of the early Christian movement" insofar as "the idea of resurrection unintentionally tapped into the disciplinary mechanisms of power" as described by Foucault (52–53). For Foucault, disciplinary power is a contrast to the centrality of sovereign power in that the former "is centered not on the body, but on the soul" and so indicates a shift to the question of knowledge production where the inner life of the soul and the self are produced by the act of power instead of being acted upon in a top-down manner (58–60). In other words, "For discipline to take root, a soul must first be born [read: produced], upon which the instrument of observation can operate" (86). For, as Foucault put it, reversing the typical Platonic formula, the "soul is the prison of the body," [6] forming and shaping it, disciplining it but in a manner that is no longer direct but has reproduced the very mechanisms of reproduc-

6. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* trans. and ed. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 30.

tion within an "internal self" distinct from, but united with, the body.

What follows is a theological analysis of why resurrection displays such a fitting example of this Foucaultian analysis (85–160). It would be impossible to reproduce the analysis here, but needless to say that it is both provocative and extremely helpful in addressing the questions of the continuity and change of identity reflected in the realities of early Christianity. The typical caricatures of a Platonic body-soul dualism displacing a more "Hebraic" somatic holism has no place here – and Stefan rewards the careful reader with some incredibly detailed analysis regarding the differentiation and interrelation of body, soul, and how meaning was made from their friction and unity. "Second and Third century articulations of the resurrection began […] to chart a path that understood the vital importance of the body (to which the flesh is pinned), alongside the immortal existence of the soul. The internal and external self are independent, yet deeply intertwined so that they need one another for the pending judgment" (95). Indeed, while many of the narratives were yet to be fully formed, "narrative and theological articulations of the resurrected Jesus perform the work of individualizing the operations of power and construction of knowledge of the self" (96), which in turn created a cohesion amongst the diversity of early Christian expression and life by not only creating and inscribing individual souls, but also marking out how Jesus was thought to play a role in the daily lives of Christians (100–101).

While some Christians may have reservations about enlisting Foucault, Stefan's use of his analyses are not only fruitful but mesh well with the recent rediscovery of how religion – even theology – functioned in Foucault's work. It seems only appropriate

in turn that his insights should bear fruit within Christian discourse. Stefan has provide a complex look at how the theology of resurrection functioned in early Christianity, and the result of his study, both rich and rewarding, cannot be ignored. It is not only a demonstration of the strength that interdisciplinary work can bring to the table, but also allows theological tropes that may no longer seize us because of their familiarity gain a new timbre and heft that was always there but that had been left unexamined for too long.

Clandestine Theology: A Non-Philosopher's Confession of Faith.
François Laruelle. Translated by Andrew Sackin-Poll. London:
Bloomsbury, 2021. Pp. xlix + 240
Reviewed by Jeremy R. Smith, *Western University*

Clandestine Theology: A Non-Philosopher's Confession of Faith is
the latest translation of French philosopher François Laruelle,
published originally in Paris in 2019 from Éditions Kimé. This text
is one of the few texts in Laruelle's oeuvre addressing the themes
of Christology, theology, mysticism, Gnosis, and heresy,
elaborating on what he calls non-theology.[1]

    Clandestine Theology contains five chapters, with its
introduction as a complementary coda in the original. As a personal
text, akin to that of Pierre Bourdieu's *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*,[2]
Laruelle's confession is a sketch or outline for a non-philosophical
confession from a determined intellectual, one who expresses his
fidelity to the generic human stripped of theological and religious
overdeterminations: those without-religion. The original text's
"Invocation" is omitted, where Laruelle humbly attests that "[on]
what I do not know, whether the history and dogmas of religions
(Christian or not), I will be silent…But I will speak in the words of
what I know a bit, the Christian religion, with some concepts,
dogmas, and historical events that it provides me."[3]

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1. See, for instance, François Laruelle, *Le Christ futur* (Paris: Exils Éditeur,
2002), translated by Anthony Paul Smith as *Future Christ*: *A Lesson in Heresy*,
(London: Bloomsbury, 2010); *Christo-fiction: les ruines d'Athènes et de
Jérusalem* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), translated by Robin Mackay as *Christo-
Fiction: The Ruins of Athens and Jerusalem* (New York: Columbia University
Press, 2015); *Éthique de l'étranger: du crime contre l'humanité* (Paris:
Éditions Kimé, 2000).
2. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago:
The University of Chicago Press, 2008).
3. François Laruelle, *Théologie clandestine pour les sans-religion: une*

The first chapter distinguishes faith from belief, grounding concepts – Man-in-person, Lived-without-Life, True-without-Truth, and the genericized notion of faith, denuded of theological and Worldly overdeterminations – that appear throughout the text. The second chapter develops a form of non-Christian practice of Christianity through a reading of the Gospels. The third chapter analyzes the distinction between surviving scripture and glorious scripture, finding in the latter a generalized form of deconstruction which produces theo- and philo-fictions that are transformative from their restrictive, onto-theo-(Greco/Judaic)-logical enclosures. The fourth, continuing on the theme of non-Christianity, performs a dualysis of the Trinity, dualysis being a method endemic to non-philosophy which places two symptoms in proximal relation to the last instance of the One.[4] Lastly, the fifth chapter constructs a theory of clandestine non-religion, moving from original or radical sin to that of radical evil, developing themes from Laruelle's oeuvre.

Given my reading of the reviewer's copy, I find the translation by Andrew Sackin-Poll unsound in comparison to previous ones, even those published by Bloomsbury. Multiple errors – many of which skew the original – must be explored. Some are miniscule, such as translating Laruelle's neologisms *formal* and *matérial* to "formal" and "material" in English (17), contrary to the now-standard usage of the latter introduced by Nicola Rubczak and

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confession de foi du non-philosophe (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2019), 7: "Sur ce que je sais ne pas savoir, soit l'histoire et les dogmes des religions, chrétiennes ou non, je me tairai. . . . Mais je parlerai dans les mots de ce que je sais un peu, la religion chrétienne, avec les quelques concepts, dogmes et évènements historiques qu'elle me fournit." My translation.

4. Note that portions of this chapter also appear in another text. See François Laruelle, *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 201–204.

Anthony Paul Smith as "materi*el*."[5] In this instance, formal would be translated as "form*el*" in English. Other examples are more compromising, such as translating the French *clonage* as "clonage" rather than "cloning" (25, 99, 101, 123, 124, 134, 135, 139, 163, 173). The translator also omits the use of brackets for translated words, a recognized practice used to contextualize the original French. Phrases that appear in the original, such as *réaliation* or *Déconvertissez-vous* do not appear in brackets alongside the clunky "real-lation" (22)[6] or "Un-covert [sic] yourselves" (31).[7]

 While the above examples are egregious, they by no means undermine the text as a whole. However, there are more damning errors. On two separate occasions in his translation, Sackin-Poll makes substantial alterations. In the original French, Laruelle writes:

> Le protestantisme est la plus judaïque des confessions chrétiennes, il radicalize ou immanentise, mais sur le mode d'une intériorité donc encore d'une transcendance, toujours pas d'une véritable immanence, à la fois la mediation christique qui permet de se passer de Dieu et du monde, et l'essence immediate de cette mediation sous la forme non plus de la transcendence judaïque exacerbée mais d'une intériorité

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5. See François Laruelle, *Théologie clandestine*, 20–21: "Ce doit être un a priori spécial ni substantiel ni formel, matérial plutôt que matériel, formal plutôt que formel, *pour* la philosophie et la théologie, donnant ou manifestant sous une forme simplifiée leur nature duplice initiale." (Emphases in original). Compare to François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 305n2.

6. I would render this as "realiation" akin to a type of realization that cannot be done within the philosophical register.

7. I would render this as a declaration, "deconvert!" and relate it to Laruelle's interest in degrowth around the same time of this text's original writing. See his essay, "The Degrowth of Philosophy: Toward a Generic Ecology (2012)," in François Laruelle, *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2012), 327–349.

exacerbée. *Si l'on peut dire*, le protestantisme est la judaïsation de la mediation comme intériorité.[8]

Compare to Sackin-Poll:

> Protestantism is the most Judaic of all Christian confessions. The Protestant reformation makes confession more radical and immanent through interiority, which remains a mode of transcendence, always one step away from real immanence. The mediation of Christ at once permits the passage from God to the World and the immediate essence of mediation, no longer through an exacerbated Judaic transcendence but an exacerbated interiority. *Protestantism makes the mediation of Christ Jewish in terms of interiority* (164, emphasis mine).

This passage is rife with confusions. Sackin-Poll chooses "mediation of Christ" rather than the standard "Christic mediation" and misuses the negative *pas* as "step" rather than contrasting transcendental interiority with veritable immanence. The phrase "de se passer de Dieu et du monde" should be translated as "doing without God and the world," not, as Sackin-Poll renders, "permits the passage from God to the World." Furthermore, one wonders why Laruelle's humble statement "si l'on peut dire" (which could be translated as "so to speak" or "if I may say so") is removed, instead rendered as a bold antisemitic statement. Even without nuance and explanation, the French original is more ambiguous in its approach than in this translation. If the original accompanied the translation, it may have saved the reader from this jarring translation.

Let us consider a second example. In the original Laruelle states: "L'insurrection de la foi foreclose à toute croyance oppose

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8. Laruelle, *Théologie clandestine*, 156. Emphases mine.

maintenant la «résurrection» glorieuse du Christ à la cadavérisation du Dieu juif survivant.'"[9] Compare to Sackin-Poll:

> The insurrection of faith, foreclosed or forbidden in advance to every belief, now sets the Glorious 'Resurrection' of Christ in opposition to the *vampire-like* [sic] cadaverization of the surviving Jewish God (54, emphasis mine).

The original does not include "vampire-like," a change that is not only erroneous but dangerous. Anglophone reception of Laruelle's critique of Jewish thinkers like Lévinas and Derrida and the Judaic component of the philosophical decision has been generally misunderstood,[10] and this translation acts to exacerbate the misunderstanding. As these alterations ventriloquize Laruelle as seemingly antisemitic without any explanation, I am led to question the veracity of Sackin-Poll's translation.

What is non-philosophy? It is a practice with and from the materials of philosophy (more specifically) and the multiplicity and unity of worlds or disciplines (more generally) divested of authoritative legislation over the Real, the One, and/or the human and redistributed to the human in order to fashion weapons, and defense, against these dominating and abasing universals. Fundamentally, the five human theorems in *A Biography of Ordinary Man*[11] explain the immediate givens of non-philosophical

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9. Laruelle, *Théologie clandestine*, 54.

10. For an account and rebuttal to this charge of antisemitism in Laruelle's work, see Anthony Paul Smith, *François Laruelle's Principles of Non-Philosophy: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 87–93.

11. François Laruelle, *Une biographie de l'homme ordinaire: des Autorités et des Minorités* (Paris: Aubier, 1985), translated by Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet as *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

rebellion: the human really exists and is really distinct from the world; the human is a mystical living being condemned to action and doomed to practice; the human is condemned a second time to philosophy; these condemnations organize the human's destiny into authorities such as World, History, Language, Sexuality and Power; and that a rigorous science of the ordinary human is possible.[12] Further still, non-philosophy is not only a *possible* practice of philosophical thought, it is also *real*: it asymmetrically unfolds in a democratic "politics of invention" towards a future world and a future for thought where everyone and no one is and can be a philosopher without becoming one, to use philosophy for one's needs foreclosed to philosophical sufficiency and its circularity.[13]

As *Clandestine Theology* dates back to 2012, it is wise to position the text alongside others from that period (typically referred to as Philosophie V).[14] *Introduction aux sciences génériques* (2008),[15] *Philosophie non-standard* (2010),[16] *Anti-Badiou* (2011),[17] and *Théorie générale des victims* (2012)[18] are

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12. Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, 1. Translation is modified.
13. For politics of invention, please see: François Laruelle, *Tétralogos: un opéra de philosophies* (Paris: Cerf, 2018), 54. For a more programmatic explanation of non-philosophy, I recommend that the reader consult François Laruelle, "Ne faites pas comme les philosophes: inventez la philosophie!" in *En tant qu'un: la «non-philosophie» expliquée aux philosophes* (Paris: Aubier, 1991), 145–171.
14. Anne-Françoise Schmid, "Foreword," in *Clandestine Theology*, xi. Though as noted earlier, some of this content may in fact appear as early as 2007.
15. François Laruelle, *Introduction aux sciences génériques* (Paris: Éditions Pétra, 2008).
16. François Laruelle, *Philosophie non-standard: générique, quantique, philo-fiction* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2010).
17. François Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou: sur l'introduction du maoïsme dans la philosophie* (Paris: Kimé, 2011), translated by Robin Mackay as *Anti-Badiou: The Introduction of Maoism into Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
18. François Laruelle, *Théorie générale des victims* (Paris: Fayard, 2012),

situated within the milieu of *Clandestine Theology*, yet Sackin-Poll's "Translator's Note" fails to note this. These texts are marked with the introduction of the notion of the generic, defined in *Introduction aux sciences génériques* as a "type of sufficiently neutral sciences or knowledges [*connaissances*] that are deprived of particularity, to be able to add themselves to more determined sciences and co-operate with them, and transforming these sciences without destroying them or negating their scientific character…to transform understanding without philosophically destroying it."[19] It is a period where Laruelle is heavily invested in questions of the victim: a multitude or "our ordinary messiahs" who need defense against the thought-world through the solution of "[de-Christianizing] Christian notions, [de-Judaizing] Jewish notions, [de-Islamicizing] Islamic notions…[to ensure] their mutation into materials and thus also into models of the new ethics."[20] This focus on the victim runs through the heart of *Anti-Badiou*, as it regards the status of the *sans-papiers* in France (the undocumented migrant workers and surplus populations) as strangers. Even the philosopher cannot come to the aid of the stranger, "instead [playing] the role of the Bad Shepherd."[21] In all of these texts, the determined intellectual, the non-philosopher, genericizes all of these harassing worldly forces to become material non-reconfigured by, for, and from the human being in-the-last-instance, who "is a superposition of vicious circles."[22]

    Clandestine Theology is, in my reading, a personal text. It is Laruelle's confession, as a non-philosopher, of his faith in-Man [*en-*

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translated by Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet as *General Theory of Victims* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

19. Laruelle, *Introduction aux sciences génériques*, 9. My translation.
20. François Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, 124.
21. François Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou,* 231.
22. François Laruelle, *Philosophie non-standard,* 9. My translation.

Homme]. Non-philosophical confession can be done by anyone, at any point, though done under a plurality of conjunctures. That is, not just Christianity, but one can conceive of the Christic that Laruelle describes, as Anthony Paul Smith notes, in Judaism and Islam, or Hinduism; in short, there are a plurality of non-theological approaches, potentially and actually.[23] As it is a clandestine theology for those without religion, this confession is the hidden secret that is (of or from) unreflective immanence, a heresy that undoes the plane of salvation, making of it, like the future,[24] a *tabula rasa*. *Clandestine Theology* is only but *one* confession of a non-philosopher: there are many to be done, many to be expected. One wonders what happens when Laruelle's mere faith happens to be a faith shared amongst other strangers who are equally harassed by this world qua hell.

In this review, I have sought to issue a warning to active consumers of contemporary French philosophy, and to test out a summary of non-philosophy, applying that to the situatedness of the text in relation to what the reader may expect, to make them eager to experiment with and experience Non-philosophy. Non-philosophy strives to grip the masses, not by way of a Christocentric colonized-colonizing mission, but by way of the Good News that each and every One is a stranger to each and every religion and their theodicies. *Clandestine Theology* leaves one wanting for a future of non-philosophy and its translations beyond the standardized translation model.

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23. See Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 147.
24. See François Laruelle, *La lutte et l'utopie à la fin des temps philosophiques* (Paris: Kimé, 2004), 117–126, translated by Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith as *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012), 137–149.

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- Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 123
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- Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis,* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 18.

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- Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?,* 124.
- Killingsworth and Palmer, "Millennial Ecology," 34.
- Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 25.

*Please avoid the use of "ibid" (See: Chicago Manual of Style, 17th ed., 14.34).

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