

Introduction

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Introduction

The Graduate Student Association of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, is pleased to offer the inaugural issue of *Illumine*, a peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary graduate journal. The objective of *Illumine* is to provide a discriminating and imaginative, scholarly forum for written work by British Columbia graduate students that explores any facet of the interdependency between religion and society. Additionally, it is the hope of *Illumine*'s editors that the journal will contribute to the development of a scholarly community among its targeted audience; this, by fostering awareness of common research fields and interests that might spark future collaboration or inspire mutual, intellectual and academic benefit.

Illumine's interdisciplinary character reflects the integral involvement of humankind's religious life within all dimensions of society and culture. Consistent with this, the journal strives for a capacious approach that encourages the unfettered examination of the multifarious ways in which this involvement has been manifested throughout human history. Contributors are free to employ any among a breadth of academic domains, theoretical paradigms, methodological apparatuses, and expository formats. Also in this vein, *Illumine* is committed to comparativity and seeks to include writings that analyze a variety of religious traditions and concomitant, cultural or civilizational contexts.

This issue presents six articles that together exemplify the broad scope of our new publication. In her innovative paper, 'The Virgin's Peculiar Breast: Negotiating Nudity in Devotional Paintings', Nancy Yakimoski contributes a provocative examination of representations of nudity in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Christian paintings. Yakimoski synthesizes feminist art history interpretations of the process of assigning meaning to stylized and realistic depictions of nudity, together with her own reading of the relationship between lived and represented Christianity.

May Ying Mary Ngai's essay, 'The Origins of the *Jingzong xuehui* 淨宗學會, or the Pure Land Learning Center', provides a detailed and original historical analysis illuminating the ways in which the centuries-old tradition of Pure Land Buddhism in China has proven conducive to the

rise of a modernized, Taiwan-based Pure Land Learning Center. In charting the development of Pure Land Buddhism, Ngai demonstrates how a line of relatively recent leaders within the tradition have prepared the ground for the tradition's adaptation to globalization and the prevalence of modern, information technology.

In 'Overcoming Metaphysics: George Grant and the Good Beyond Being', Randy 'Peg' Peters engages closely with a variety of primary texts – both published and unpublished – by the eminent Canadian philosopher, George Grant. On this basis, the article offers a compelling analysis of how Grant interpreted the Platonic notion of the 'Good beyond Being' as a religiously significant foundation for contemplative thought and just action in the modern world. Peters examines how Grant both drew upon and distinguished himself from other philosophers, notably Martin Heidegger and Simone Weil, in an effort to overcome the effects of hegemonic, modern rationality.

In his paper, 'Coming to Our Senses: Rediscovering Rites of Passage for Contemporary Youth', Patrick Amos discusses the erosion of socially sanctioned rites of passage for youth and offers his model, drawn primarily from First Nations Elders, for a wilderness healing program for youth. Amos suggests that through intense immersion experiences in Nature, a supra-personal self-concept will emerge, generating an initiatory process. Whereas this does not include the participants' own evaluation of the program, it presents a thought-provoking beginning for dialogue about adolescent needs and alternative treatment programs.

Marking a transition from the essay format, Steve Bentheim contributes an interview with the prominent scholar of Buddhism, Robert Florida. 'Eastern Buddhism and Western Ethics: An Interview with Robert Florida' stands as an object example not only of the effectiveness of the interview as a methodological approach to research, but also the virtue (and inherent challenges) of engaging comparatively between Buddhist and Western conceptions of ethics. The interview format reveals the extemporaneous nature of a dynamic dialogue, resulting in a lively presentation of ideas.

The issue concludes with ‘*Dastafshani (Ecstasy): The Art of S. Mohammad Ehsaey*’, Leslie Stanick’s review of a Vancouver exhibition of contemporary Islamic calligraphy as abstract painting. The article is a strikingly illustrated account of how the work of Ehsaey, an Iranian master calligrapher and graphic artist, bespeaks his ‘remembrance of God’. Integrating an interview with the artist, the review is notable for its intimate engagement with lived, religious experience – specifically, calligraphy centering on the painted inscription of the name, Allah, and the phrase, ‘la ilaha illa Allah’ (‘there is no god but God’).

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