

Introduction

Catherine M. Nutting

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INTRODUCTION

As we investigate the interplay of religion and society, now and in history, we see contested practices; cultural bridges repurposed for religion; and meanings reassessed, transmuted, deconstructed, and refitted. We observe the overlapping of one era with the concepts and connotations that linger from previous times, even while people struggle to come to terms with newly emerging mindsets. Many of the articles in the current volume of *Illumine* refer to the interplay of the sacred with the secular, including, for example, links between musical traditions and written Psalms; between poetry and storytelling; and among religious buildings and their ties to commercial and cultural neighbourhoods. Together the articles illuminate the interweavings of sacredness and secularity that flow through literature, music, visual art, architecture, and community. To borrow from one of the articles this snippet of poetry that beautifully reminds readers of the capacity for spirituality and for natural and artistic forms to linger on: “soft, above the noontide heat and burden/ of the stern present, fleet those melodies.”

The issue begins with “‘Winter Stories—Ghost Stories... Round The Christmas Fire’: Victorian Ghost Stories and The Christmas Market” in which Caley Ehnes finds a case study in the 1852 Christmas number of Dickens’s *Household Words*. The publication there of Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Old Nurse’s Story” points to the 19th-century English desire to reassert religious traditions in contrast to increasing secularity. Victorian ghost stories such as Gaskell’s are replete with cultural affirmations rooted in Early Modern Christian values. Ehnes shows that the Christmas ghost stories, though they harken back to Gothic motifs, contrast social ills with time-honoured ideals of Christian domestic practices to challenge the modern scepticism and scientific rationalism that underlie the period’s burgeoning

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industrialization and secularization. The ghost stories inspired readers to reinhabit redemptive religious and familial traditions that had been eroded by modernity in the forms of commercialism, technology, and the hubbub of industrialization.

Adam Hough argues for taking music seriously in “Martin Luther and Musically Expressed Theology.” Hough investigates Luther’s treatises, his scriptural interpretations, his sermons, and scholarship on his conversations, to conclude that Luther considered music foundational to his theological programme. Luther’s use of music is more than merely a devotional aid or a congregational inspiration. Rather, he hoped that it would foster faith and prepare the German laity for reform. The optimism of his attitude toward music in the 1520s demonstrates its centrality to his evangelical theology: he sought to reform society and politics by excising temporal authority from religious systems. Music would be fundamental to liturgical and educational reform where to sing Luther’s hymns was to proclaim the Word of God. To Luther, music was a gift from God and a means toward sincere spiritual inspiration, a tradition bequeathed from the prophets and apostles. Singing hymns was, in this conception, an excellent teaching method, an opportunity to investigate and proclaim the Psalms, and a preparation for the Holy Spirit, as long as a person sang “with both the spirit and the mind.”

In “Embracing the Divine: Devotional Zeal and Mystical ‘Humanation’ in Rembrandt’s Annunciation Sketch,” Catherine Nutting explores how the 17th-century interest in personally experiencing God’s grace can be linked to earlier mystical traditions of impassioned communion. Rembrandt van Rijn was highly skilled at sketching, and his rough drawings are as dramatic and communicative as his best paintings. Many of his sketches of Old and New Testament subjects focus on transformative moments where divine figures intercede in human affairs. Such scenes are psychologically forceful, and point to the urgent Early Modern desire to understand how God’s grace operated. *Humanation* was the medieval notion of divinity and humanity becoming united in one person through the “marriage” of God and humanity, a concept that supported later beliefs in God’s love for humanity and his freely offered grace, notions at play in Rembrandt’s artistic Annunciation.

Angela Andersen is the author of “The Buddhist Monastery, Art and Teachings as a Factor in the Development of North Indian and

Central Asian Islamic Practice and Architecture.” Andersen writes on how Buddhism and Islam influenced each other through decorative arts, philosophical treatises, didactic activities, and the architecture that evidences these religious and social practices in northern India and Central Asia beginning in the 7th Century. An examination of Sufi and Buddhist ascetic and teaching traditions reveals many important similarities. Their common interest in housing venerable images and sculptures led to the importation of valuable materials, skilled craftspeople, and precious *spolia* from India, building on the forces of development internal to Islam to further enhance the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism on Sufi architectural styles and decorative motifs. Andersen discusses case studies that highlight juxtapositions of the Islamic Sufi lodge or *khanqah* and the Buddhist monastery or *sangha* including one Silk Road lodge-monastery complex that shows Buddhism’s influence on Sufi visual and architectural expression, a rare example preserved in the written record long after its material remains have been dispersed to the elements.

Our final article is by Laura Visan who, in “Romanian Churches in Toronto: Not Yet Factors of Cohesion,” asks whether churches can function in building community. She unpacks her ethnographic research on the subject of the churchgoing practices of Romanian immigrants living in Toronto in order to discern the churches’ efforts at community cohesion. Focusing on two Romanian churches, the Saint George Orthodox Church and the All Saints Orthodox Church, she shows that the complex roles of churches are inherently bound up with church members’ personal histories and expectations. Visan argues that scholarship on how churches foster community involvement and help to develop interpersonal networks must be considered in the light of personalities, idiosyncratic obstacles, and personal narratives about identity and belonging.

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Catherine M. Nutting
Editor