

## Introduction

Justine Semmens

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## INTRODUCTION

To paraphrase from Stuart Hall's lecture at Goldsmith's Hall, London in 1997, categories of difference like race, gender, and class work like languages. Our bodies are the text on which these languages are written and each of us is a reader. What happens, then, when these bodies become sacred texts? Put differently, how does religion intersect with contemporary and historical conceptions of difference? The collection of essays in the present volume seeks to address this question.

Our collection opens with Dustin Zielke's powerful exploration of Jesus as a racialized messiah in the lyrical poetry of the late Tupac Shakur in his essay, "Black Jesus, Religious Truth, and Tupac Shakur: Belief and the Irony of Faith." Zielke frames his study through a problematization of the semantic connection between *belief* and *faith* in order to understand and reinterpret the meaning of religious Truth in secular and post-denominational contexts.

Laurie Baker's insightful contribution, "Creating an Environment so Someone Can Come to Christ: 'Relevant' Environments, Audio/Video Technology, and Ritual Practice," examines the role that gender plays in the relationship between modern audiovisual technology and American Evangelical praxis. According to Baker "contoured by metaphors of mastery, control, power and obligation, much of the contemporary evangelical worship in the United States is informed by a desire to reveal, communicate and perform the glory of God through a commitment to "excellence" in mediated ritual performance" that excludes women and reinvestigates "traditional" gender roles (20).

The final three papers deal with the problem of clashing worldviews in "post-Colonial" Canadian culture. Engaging indirectly with literary studies' inheritance of Said's use of the Other to understand the relationship between the colonizer and colonized,

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Sonu Purhar's essay, "Ephemeral Identity in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*," perceptively employs literary criticism in order to understand the complicated definitions of religious identity, spiritual community, and *indigeneity* in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*.

Toby Goldbach's incisive examination of sentencing circles as a form of alternative justice in Canada's judicial system in her essay "Sentencing Circles, Clashing Worldviews, and the Case of Christopher Pauchay," confronts the dilemmas inherent in trying to adapt First Nations approaches to sacred justice to the Canadian penal system. Looking closely at the case of Christopher Pauchay, Goldbach demonstrates how, without closer reflection and evaluation, alternative methods intended to appeal to a broader spectrum of cultural diversity can actually become a force of recolonization.

Jonathan Napier's thought-provoking piece, "Interfaith Dialogue Theory and Native/Non-Native Relations," provides a critical analysis of interfaith dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous communities in Canada. Providing a critical perspective on interfaith dialogue theory, Napier closes in on the critical issues that Purhar and Goldbach grapple with and provides a discursive space in which to consider wider questions of religious identity, worldview, and community in indigenous and non-indigenous Canadian society.

Representing a diverse collection of interdisciplinary scholarship by graduate students from across Canada, we hope that the present volume of *Illumine* will help to untangle the very complicated and culturally contingent relationships between religious theory and practice and the semantics of difference.

Justine Semmens, editor

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History, University of Victoria

Graduate Student Fellow, Centre for Studies in Religion and Society