

FRIDAY APRIL 4	
Registration 4:00-5:00 (Golf Room)	
KEYNOTE ADDRESS – 5:00 PM	
Location: Golf Room	Dr. Slavica Jakelić <i>(Richard P. Baepler Distinguished Professor in the Humanities, Valparaiso University)</i> Beyond the Impasse in the Study of Religion and Nationalism? What Religious Studies Can Offer and Why That Matters
Following the Keynote, join us for dinner and drinks in the same location	

SATURDAY APRIL 5	
<i>Registration & Welcome – 8:30-9:00 AM (Golf Room)</i>	
SESSION ONE – 9:00-10:30	
Panel A – Religion and Popular Culture	
Location: Golf Room	Aaron Ricker (<i>Bishop's University</i>) Moderator
	Hannah McKillop (<i>University of Ottawa</i>) The Good Place: A Case Study for Conceptualizing Non-Religious Ethics and Morality in the United States
	William Atkinson (<i>Queen's University</i>) Gym, Tan, Laundry: An Investigation of the Homosocial Implications of the Masculinity Ritual of GTL in Jersey Shore
	Joel Stoker (<i>Elmira College</i>) The Use of Popular Culture in Pedagogy for the Modern Religious Studies Student: Case Studies in Classroom Experimentation
<i>BREAK – 10:30-10:45</i>	
SESSION TWO – 10:45-12:15	
Panel A – Encounters and Exchanges	
Location: Board Room	Chris Miller (<i>University of Toronto</i>) Moderator
	Samia Ahmed (<i>McGill University</i>) and Jaffar Mahmoud (<i>Johns Hopkins University</i>) From “Muslims in America” to “American Islam”: Generational Shifts and the Emergence of a Distinctly North American Religion
	Tad Robinson (<i>Muhlenberg College</i>) Providence in Spinoza's Universal Faith
	William Atkinson (<i>Queen's University</i>) Your Body My Choice: The United States war in Afghanistan, Imperial Feminism, and the Domination of Liberation

Panel B – Graduate Student Workshop: Academic Publishing

Location: Golf Room	Join EIR President Damon Berry for a conversation about the ins and outs of academic publishing. Damon will bring his perspective and expertise on how to navigate publishing in a range of different venues. Students and early career researchers are also encouraged to bring any questions they might have!
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LUNCH – 12:15-1:45

SESSION THREE – 1:45-3:15

Panel A – The State of Our Field

Location: Golf Room	William Gruen (<i>Muhlenberg College</i>) Moderator
	Jacques Quintin (<i>Université de Sherbrooke</i>) Gadamer and the Future of religious studies
	Aaron Ricker (<i>Bishop's University</i>) Industry and Ivory
	Linden Smith (<i>Syracuse University</i>) Towards an Unscientific Study of Religion

BREAK – 3:15-3:30

SESSION FOUR – 3:30-5:00

Panel A – Religion Through a Technological Lens

Location: Board Room	Geoffrey Hodges (<i>Queen's University</i>) Moderator
	Anne-Marie Fowler (<i>University of Toronto</i>) The Future Interrupts Us! How Religion's Messianic Vocabularies Meet 21st Century Managerial "Model Collapse."
	Daniel Miller (<i>Bishop's University</i>) "Augmented Lecturing": Energizing Religious Studies Instruction for the Undergraduates of Today and Tomorrow

Panel B – Applied Humanities: Religious Studies Outside the Academy	
Location: Golf Room	Damon Berry (<i>St. Lawrence University</i>) Moderator
	Kathleen M. Self (<i>St. Lawrence University</i>) Panelist
	Brook Henkel (<i>St. Lawrence University</i>) Panelist
Reception – 5:00-6:00	
Location: Golf Room	<i>Join us for a reception, featuring light snacks and conversation among colleagues!</i>

SUNDAY APRIL 6	
EIR BUSINESS MEETING – 9:00-9:30	
Location: Golf Room	All attendees are welcome to join us for the EIR's Business Meeting, where we will share updates for the Region and announce the winners of our Student Paper Awards
SESSION ONE – 9:30-10:30	
Panel A – Secularization and Social Change	
Location: Golf Room	Daniel Miller (<i>Bishop's University</i>) Moderator
	Alexandre Duceppe-Lenoir (<i>McGill University</i>) The Entanglement of Re-enchantment and Implicit Religion
	Grace Richards (<i>Carleton University</i>) 1970s North American Counterculture and Hinduism: The Impacts of Secularization on Religion
Panel B – Sub-Fields in the Study of Religion	
Location: Board Room	Damon Berry (<i>St. Lawrence University</i>) Moderator
	Camden MacKenzie (<i>Queen's University</i>) Tradition is Legitimacy: The History and Future of Entheogenic Religions in Canada
	Shashank Rao (<i>University of Toronto</i>) Hindu Studies in the Time of Hindu Nationalism
<i>BREAK – 10:30-10:45</i>	

SESSION TWO – 10:45-12:15

Panel A – Texts and Adaptations

Location: Golf Room	Aaron Ricker (<i>Bishop's University</i>) Moderator
	Muhammad Mourad Agha (<i>Wilfrid Laurier University</i>) Blurring Boundaries: Artificial Intelligence in Quranic Recitation
	Hannah Cheslock (<i>McGill University</i>) What is a Faithful Adaptation? An Investigation into the Politics of Biblical Adaptations

Panel B – Sacred Bodies, Sacred Spaces

Location: Board Room	Joel Stoker (<i>Elmira College</i>) Moderator
	Orresta James Paddock (<i>Cherry Hill Seminary</i>) Reconstructing Sacred Architecture: The Benefits and Challenges of Worship Spaces in Modern Paganism
	Geoffrey Hodges (<i>Queen's University</i>) Transhumanism, Cyberpunk, and Indigenous Kinship: Re-examining Transhumanist Questions Through Indigenous Belief Systems
	Aneri Patel (<i>University of Toronto</i>) Reimagining Sacred Space: The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor and the Mediation of Pilgrimage

Abstracts (listed in alphabetical order, by surname)

Samia Ahmed (*McGill University*) and **Jaffar Mahmoud** (*Johns Hopkins University*) From “Muslims in America” to “American Islam”: Generational Shifts and the Emergence of a Distinctly North American Religion

While Islam in North America is often framed as an immigrant or foreign religion, this paper argues that not only are such labels historically misrepresentative, but that Islam today should be regarded as a distinctly North American religion. From historical records of enslaved African Muslims to present-day second- and third-generation American Muslims, there is increasing evidence to suggest that 'Muslims in America,' or more aptly 'American Muslims,' have become a key feature in the continent's religious landscape. Drawing on interview data, this paper highlights how American Muslims affirm their North American identity alongside their Muslim faith. Today, second and third-generation Muslims, as well as converts, reject labels like 'immigrant' or 'convert,' reflecting a generational identity shift. For younger Muslims, their identity even transcends the post-9/11 stigma, which for two decades branded Muslims as 'other,' inimical, or an apologetic exception to American values.

This emergent 'American Islam' manifests in distinctly American expressions, from halal burger joints to the rise of Muslim athletes and creatives, as well as through intellectual engagements that emphasize self-affirmation of belief while critiquing cultural accretions. Even as we look towards Muslim institutions, including masjids, schools, and organizations, we find they have adapted and conformed to American societal expectations. This 'Americanization' of Islam is evident in the Protestant-inspired emphasis on congregationalism, individualism, and theological purification among American Muslim communities. We contend that Islam in North America is no longer 'a foreign transplant' but a dynamic, rooted faith tradition shaped by and contributing to the broader American religious landscape.

William Atkinson (*Queen's University*) Gym, Tan, Laundry: An Investigation of the Homosocial Implications of the Masculinity Ritual of GTL in Jersey Shore

Released in 2009, Jersey Shore follows the lives of eight self-proclaimed 'Guidos and Guidettes'. Within the show, the Guidos engage in a ritual of gym, tan, and laundry 'referred to intra the show as GTL. While the show depicts the ritual as being a precursor to the Guidos attending the boardwalk in order to find a potential Guidette to 'smush' (the show's term for sexual intercourse), I argue that the ritual is more accurately understood as a cite of homosocial experience. Describing the non-sexual platonic relationship which men have among themselves and which allows men to access intimacy more commonly associated with women, homosociality is the site of male intimacy in a world which often pressures men to not be intimate with one another, associating male intimacy with homosexuality. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler and gender performativity and Ronald Grimes and ritual studies, I argue that GTL is the site of male homosocial experience rather than a courtship ritual of performance for Guidettes.

William Atkinson (*Queen's University*) Your Body My Choice: The United States war in Afghanistan, Imperial Feminism, and the Domination of Liberation

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the United States invaded Afghanistan in pursuit of Osama Bin Laden. The reason for the war changed several times over the course of the war; beginning as a quest for revenge, shifting to a holy mission from God 'owing to George Bush's Evangelical credentials, and to a war of spreading democracy and feminism to a fundamentally undemocratic and unfeminist people. Laura Bush gave a speech at the outset of the war in which she argued that the U.S. was protecting the dignity of Afghan women, employing Orientalist and Islamophobic discourses around feminism as it relates to the Middle East and Muslim women. The framing of the war disregards the work of Muslim feminists and the histories of feminism in Afghanistan and the cultural context of feminism in the country. Western feminists celebrated the invasion as bringing feminism at gunpoint, speaking over Afghan feminists and not too them. This feminism-at-gunpoint logic has been once again deployed by Israel and its allies in the attacks on Gaza, arguing that feminism has never existed in Gaza and Palestine and that through the Israeli incursion, Palestinian women will be freed. Once again, Western Feminists have spoken over Palestinian feminists rather than too them, ignoring the work and the cultural context.

Alexandre Duceppe-Lenoir (*McGill University*) The Entanglement of Re-enchantment and Implicit Religion

With the recent and continuous rise of the 'spiritual but not religious' and the 'religiously unaffiliated,' the study of the secular is at the forefront of the study of religions in North America. In order to rethink secularity, implicit religions

must be studied in conjunction with traditional representations of religion (e.g., Christianity) and spirituality (e.g., Neopaganism). However, the concept of implicit religion has seldom been engaged in studies of the secular. In this paper, I aim to clarify the entanglement of Edward Bailey's concept of implicit religion from the Weberian concept of disenchantment and the subsequent scholarship on re-enchantment. In the first section, I review Bailey's concept of implicit religion and problematize it through a breakdown of the concept of traditional religion. In the second section, I offer a review of Max Weber's conceptualization of disenchantment, and give special attention to the nuanced understandings of re-enchantment that emerged out of Weberian understandings of religion. Ultimately, understanding the importance of implicit religions for individuals and groups alongside traditional representations of religion and spirituality will make scholars better equipped to deal with both the religious and the nonreligious. An understanding of implicit religion as enchantment will further bring attention to phenomena that some academics have been calling pseudo-religious, such as the 'spiritual but not religious' or the secular paradox.

Hannah Cheslock (*McGill University*) What is a Faithful Adaptation? An Investigation into the Politics of Biblical Adaptations

Adaptation studies is a growing scholarly area in English and Literary Studies that seeks to assess creative adaptations critically. Recognizing that adaptation is both a process and a product, the disciplines especially interested in questions surrounding the process of adapting intermedial work - specifically, what degree of faithfulness is the source material owed? What are the consequences of omission or fabrication in adaptive narratives? How might consumers engage differently with adaptive works depending on their pre-existing relationship with the source material? I assert that these questions are incredibly generative in a Religious Studies context, specifically when an adaptive source material is biblical. My paper will address theories of adaptation in an interdisciplinary manner and interrogate the notion of a 'faithful adaptation.' I will explore what's at stake when adapting biblical materials, especially in secular and/or interfaith contexts, in contemporary religious and political climates. This paper represents a branch of my doctoral research on twentieth and twenty-first-century dramatic adaptations of biblical texts. A central argument of my research is that dramatizing biblical stories allows for theatrical storytelling methods to be used to achieve more detailed and complex adaptations of biblical texts and that embodied performance can enrich biblical stories and bring more nuanced religious interpretations compared to other forms of two-dimensional adaptations. As such, this conference paper will use dramatic biblical adaptations (such as Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.* (1957)) as case studies and examples of approaches to adapting the Bible and the politics that come with such endeavours.

Anne-Marie Fowler (*University of Toronto*) The Future Interrupts Us! How Religion's Messianic Vocabularies Meet 21st Century Managerial "Model Collapse."

The future enters our conversations when something interrupts the present moment in a way that we didn't expect. Representing time as a line, 'the future' is the part we still haven't drawn. Yet nevertheless, the interruption still surprises us. Perhaps the AI-enabled technologies that manage human predictions, expectations, and lives had assuredly predicted a smoothly manageable continuity from what we lived yesterday. 'Crisis' and 'future' interweave suddenly, absent a recognizable continuity from the world we know. When systemic frames of politics, finance or climate we have already built careen to a halt, we experience a human form of AI "model collapse;" the very frame of our truth seems to break. We have no words to recognize a future we nonetheless feel obligated to manage. But vocabularies of Religion still do have words that systems-reliant and prediction-imbued disciplines need. Religion is different because Religion thrives in, and on, interruption. Religion as a discipline therefore holds the futureward, future-worded lenses that other disciplines require. Drawing from Rashi, Maimonides, Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig, I perform a temporally and interruptively understood reading of Creation (Genesis 1-3) so as to activate revelatory, redemptive vocabularies suited for 'interrupted' eras. Are messianic frames the frames of model collapse, or not? Addressing examples from my own past work in interacting arenas of politics, finance, and climate, I show that Religion's vocabularies construct systems to encounter a 21st century already rife with model collapse. For both human and machine, 'the future' is a necessary model component.

Geoffrey Hodges (*Queen's University*) Transhumanism, Cyberpunk, and Indigenous Kinship: Re-examining Transhumanist Questions Through Indigenous Belief Systems

Transhumanism is a concept which has gradually grown to become critically important for theologians and philosophers to address. As technology advances towards transhumanist pillars 'such as true artificial intelligence, mind uploading, or advanced cybernetics and robotics' academics from a multitude of disciplines are identifying that these pillars create a need to re-address old philosophical questions exploring the nature and determinations of 'human' or 'humanity'. These

questions are equally relevant for religious scholars to engage with as they are for philosophers, as religions find themselves needing to determine just how the human body factors into humanity and religious belief ' something made clear, for example, through the growing field of disability theology. The resurgence of these questions was not unexpected however, with many of them being presented in their most digestible forms through media and literature of the cyberpunk genre, going back as far as the mid-1900's. Works in the genre engage with all the same questions, technologies, and even religiosity as are currently being grappled with by theologians and philosophers ' and are incredibly valuable sources to dissect questions of transhumanism, religion, and humanity in ways that mirror current academic discussion. This paper seeks to use these valuable sources as a tool in discussing South American indigenous responses to transhumanist questions ' examining cyberpunk transhumanism through an indigenous lens. In particular, this paper shows that the transhumanist questions asked by developing technological fields can potentially find their answers in the expanded kinship networks of South American Indigenous belief systems.

Orresta James Paddock (*Cherry Hill Seminary*) *Reconstructing Sacred Architecture: The Benefits and Challenges of Worship Spaces in Modern Paganism*

'Sacred space is important in our practice as polytheists. There are inner and outer forms of this. Not everyone can have lavish shrines, but everyone can have inner sacred space in their heart and mind. This is the space to cultivate daily, the kind that goes with us everywhere.'

-Ptahmassu Nofra-Uaa

Religious peoples have used temples and altars as expressions of faith for thousands of years, with the Göbekli Tepe temple in southeastern Turkey dating back to Animistic practices of 10,000 BCE. While other forms of religious expression began earlier, such as ritualistic burial in prehistoric tribes, places of worship were an early influence on religious belonging. In modern Western expressions of paganism and earth-centered worship, there is a low amount of support for the creation of public worship spaces within the pagan community. Many organizations rent halls or other facilities for their worship, education, or conventions. This paper evaluates two interviews between modern pagan temples to explore the spiritual and mental benefits of having local established physical places of worship on their congregants, as well as the challenges having a physical space brings.

Camden MacKenzie (*Queen's University*) *Tradition is Legitimacy: The History and Future of Entheogenic Religions in Canada*

This paper explores the history of entheogenic religions in Canada and the Canadian government's response to them. I wish to illustrate the Canadian government's concern with ideas of legitimacy, tradition, and naturality in its approach to entheogenic religions by exploring the history of five entheogenic religions in Canada: the Native American Church, the Church of the Universe, Rastafari, Santo Daime, and Uniao do Vegetal. Drawing on James R. Lewis' work on legitimization strategies, I argue that the Canadian government is more tolerant of entheogenic religions that utilize what Lewis terms 'appeals to tradition,' and that entheogenic religions can use this appeal in the future to be viewed as more legitimate in the eyes of the Canadian government.

Hannah McKillop (*University of Ottawa*) *The Good Place: A Case Study for Conceptualizing Non-Religious Ethics and Morality in the United States*

Non-religious affiliation is rising in the United States. Non-religious people are viewed as immoral, which fuels stigmatization. I argue that the television show *The Good Place* challenges such assumptions by conceptualizing ethics outside a religious framework. Through an analysis of three episodes in the series, I argue that the show demonstrates the importance of having non-selfish motivations when doing good for others and the limits to a self-sacrificial approach to ethics. The paper, recently published in April of 2024, demonstrates the value of approaching the study of non-religious ethics through the study of American popular culture with methodologies stemming from a variety of disciplines including cultural studies, television studies, and communication studies.

Daniel Miller (*Bishop's University*) *"Augmented Lecturing": Energizing Religious Studies Instruction for the Undergraduates of Today and Tomorrow*

Perennially at a disadvantage in North America due to an erroneous public conflation with theology, the field of Religious Studies has been further battered by the general precipitous drop in undergraduate enrolment in the Humanities. Cognizant that students have grown up in the internet, smartphone and YouTube age, I have developed a pedagogical method that renders Religious Studies demonstrably relatable and immediate to students' everyday lives

while aligning with their increasingly audio-visual way of learning. 'Augmented Lecturing' functions through pairing conventional speech with sensory stimuli: relatively brief audio-visual excerpts drawn from multiple sources, curated to target lecture points. All extraneous material is edited out of the original video and audio (through, e.g., iMovie) and excerpts are then embedded within the presentation program (e.g., PowerPoint). Pauses in the shift between verbal and audio-visual modalities are eliminated. Modalities amplify and reinforce each other in a framework that continually links sensory stimuli to course material in order to activate areas of the brain that enhance learning and memory. Augmented Lecturing is particularly suited to Religious Studies. While our field is its own, discrete academic pursuit, it incorporates also a myriad of other academic domains (e.g., history, literature, politics, archaeology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, art history) in a way that no other academic discipline does. Deploying a wide-ranging audio-visual palette, Augmented Lecturing is an ideal pedagogical tool to give vibrant expression to those interdisciplinary connections and, even more critical in the current North American context, to illustrate vividly the contemporary relevance of Religious Studies.

Muhammad Mourad Agha (*Wilfrid Laurier University*) Blurring Boundaries: Artificial Intelligence in Quranic Recitation

This research explores the intersection of Quranic recitation, cultural music traditions, and emerging AI technologies. It examines the integration of "maqamat" (melodic structures) into Quranic recitation, unpacking its religious, cultural, and theological implications. While maqamat, rooted in Arabic musical tradition, has become the dominant style in the Arab world and among immigrant Muslim communities, other styles, such as AI-generated heavy metal Quranic recitations, face rejection.

By analyzing key terminologies like tajwid and tartil, the study traces the historical evolution of Quranic recitation and its connection to Islamic jurisprudence. It further explores AI as a disruptive tool, enabling innovations like female-generated voices and novel musical styles, which challenge traditional religious boundaries. These advancements raise questions about the sanctity of sacred texts in the digital era: Can AI redefine Quranic recitation's sacredness? Who has the authority to accept or reject such changes? The research also investigates theological and cultural tensions surrounding AI in religious practice, analyzing reactions from scholars and Muslim communities on platforms like YouTube. It examines how AI reshapes religious imagination, redefines gender roles, and blurs lines between the sacred and profane, offering a critical perspective on the evolving relationship between technology, culture, and deeply entrenched religious traditions.

Aneri Patel (*University of Toronto*) Reimagining Sacred Space: The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor and the Mediation of Pilgrimage

Hindu temples have long shaped religious identity, serving as spiritual sanctuaries, cultural landmarks, and symbols of collective memory. The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, launched in 2019 and inaugurated in 2021, redeveloped the space connecting the temple to the Ganges, reshaping the pilgrimage experience through modernization. By improving infrastructure and accessibility, the project reconfigures sacred space to meet the demands of both devotion and tourism, raising questions about heritage preservation, political narratives, and urban transformation. This paper examines how temple redevelopment mediates pilgrimage, drawing on Victor Turner's concept of liminality and Thomas Tweed's theory of religion as movement. Foundational works like Diana Eck's *Banaras: City of Light* and Catherine Asher's *Architecture of Mughal India* provide historical context, while Kajri Jain's *Gods in the Time of Democracy* explores the intersections of religion, politics, and material culture in contemporary India. The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor exemplifies how sacred spaces are not static but dynamically mediated through physical transformation. By analyzing this redevelopment, this paper contributes to discussions on how pilgrimage and religious identity are continually reimagined in a changing world.

Jacques Quintin (*Université de Sherbrooke*) Gadamer and the Future of religious studies

In November 2023, University of Sherbrooke (Québec) tried to close the Center of the studies of contemporary religious phenomena. In December 2024, the Center is still alive, but very vulnerable for the next years. We can speculate in different ways to the reasons behind this closure. I would like to consider this event to think about the future of religious studies. My point of view endorses not a scientific perspective, but a philosophical one. It is not facts, but ideas that bring light to what seem incomprehensible: the disappearance of interest in religious phenomena. I begin with a question: the disappearance of religious studies is it a symptom of or a sign of, that human being has lost a good amount of curiosity about alterity, strangeness, anything that escape certitude and constitute a good part of oneself?

I will propose that the future of religious studies is based on the intention to discover the human in its expressions, mainly in art (cinema, literature). To speak about religion or spirituality means to speak about human being. It is human being that is the main interest in religious studies. Therefore, it means that we stop to investigate religious phenomena as a thing, but as a phenomenon that reveals the essence of human being. It is our relationship with these phenomena that reveals what is human being. I will use the thought of the philosopher Gadamer to analyse this situation.

Shashank Rao (*University of Toronto*) Hindu Studies in the Time of Hindu Nationalism

As Hindu nationalism has become a global presence in the past few years, scholars of South Asian religious traditions have revisited the relationship of the study of religion to practitioners. The “insider-outsider” dynamic has long been part of the field’s history, and in the scholarship on Hindu traditions, it has been a formative concern. However, the question of the involvement of practitioners in Hindu studies has acquired new salience in light of current affairs. Unlike previous iterations of this debate, history has become the preferred discipline of the field’s Hindu nationalist critics. Genealogical and other forms of historical criticism have typically been central to religious studies scholarship, and in India, what Janaki Nair calls the “demand for a past” is equally central to public debates on language, literature, and religion. If history has become the dominant mode of self-understanding in India, what kind of reflexivity should this prompt from scholars of Hinduism as it relates to practitioners of Hindu traditions?

To effectively respond to the challenges posed to public understanding of the past by the spread of Hindu nationalism, we must revisit the foundations and motives of our scholarship. In my presentation, I offer a preliminary history of Hindu studies and examine the ascendancy of historicist methods in relation to the rise of Hindu nationalism. I then consider the prospects of engaging Hindu theology and other constructive fields to renew and refine the commitments of Hindu and religious studies in the face of Hindu nationalism.

Grace Richards (*Carleton University*) 1970s North American Counterculture and Hinduism: The Impacts of Secularization on Religion

In his highly influential book, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* Theodore Roszak coined the term “counterculture” a term he used to describe the growing opposition among the youth to the religious and cultural norms of the previous generation. Roszak made several observations about how a confluence of technological innovations, disillusionment with the effectiveness of institutional systems, and the growth of individualism had impacted Baby Boomers and pushed them to foster anti-establishment sentiments and seek New Age spirituality, inspired by Eastern Religious traditions. In this paper, I hope to examine the growth of a particular New Age movement, Transcendental Meditation, to determine how New Age spirituality diverges from Hinduism, and how it has changed since its inception into North American popular culture. I also apply Roszak’s observations about inter-generational differences and their causes to more modern renditions of Transcendental Meditation to see how further technological innovations and the consequent increase in expressive individualism have impacted how Western audiences engage with Hindu religious rituals and practices that have been removed from their original context. In doing so, I hope to determine how inter-generational changes and increased individuality have changed the ways society engages with religion.

Aaron Ricker (*Bishop’s University*) Industry and Ivory

This presentation outlines one concrete example of the way ‘the future of Religious Studies’ can involve Free Trade Agreements with knowledge economies outside the gates of the Ivory Tower. Like many people in the AAR guild, I crested the peak of my highly specialized academic training to face a job market of rare and precarious employment, including in some cases precarious work that I could compete with my colleagues to do for free! One emergency career option that was sometimes recommended to me was alt-ac (‘alternative academic’) work, but it was not always clear what that might mean on the ground in terms of Religious Studies.

In the years since, some parts of the picture have become a little clearer, and I’ve met a variety of excellent Religious Studies scholars who turned to alt-ac jobs to replace or supplement traditional academic jobs as the latter got harder and harder to count on. In my talk, I detail the way my own Religious Studies training has proved valuable in the private sector field of language correction software and enhanced lexicography. I explain how my ancient and modern language training is a real asset (more often than it usually is in teaching and research, actually, on a day-to-day basis), how my internalized understanding of research and writing is applied and appreciated in a paid alt-ac context, and finally how my interest in the place of ‘religion’ in human life and world history is put to work for private industry and public good.

Tad Robinson (*Muhlenberg College*) Providence in Spinoza's Universal Faith

The 17th century saw a number of distinctive irenic efforts to identify the core elements of 'true religion.' Following Hugo Grotius and Edward Herbert, Spinoza proposes what he calls the 'universal faith' in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. His aim is to provide a religious standard that both minimizes religious conflict and promotes freedom of thought within the Republic. To ground this proposed civil religion, Spinoza argues that the fundamental teaching of Scripture is to love one's neighbor, and that adherence to a specific set of doctrines is crucial for carrying out this command. To better understand this proposal, scholars have turned to Spinoza's account of the affects. The idea is to investigate whether and to what extent specific religious teachings are likely to foster (or hinder) love of one's neighbor on this account, and thereby determine the place of such a teaching in the universal faith. I adopt this approach to investigate the place of providential narratives in Spinoza's proposed civic faith. Of course from a philosophical point of view, providence, and theodicy in particular, is a profound mistake according to Spinoza. Nevertheless, I argue that Spinoza recognizes theodicy as a genuine, if flawed, expression of a basic human need, and that we find the raw materials for it baked into the doctrines of the universal faith. Ultimately, this inquiry aims to give additional insight on Spinoza's conception of the universal faith as well as his understanding of the place of theodicy, and of providential narratives more broadly in human life.

Linden Smith (*Syracuse University*) Towards an Unscientific Study of Religion

This paper will argue that religious studies should be less scientific: that the cognitive science of religion and related subfields stand to distort religion. In his *Tractatus*, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, 'We feel that even if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all.' One might read Wittgenstein here as developing Hume's assertion that an ought cannot be derived from an is: scientific data cannot tell us how to live. Thus, I would suggest that these 'problems of life' are more nearly religious problems. As Clifford Geertz puts it, 'Whatever else religion may be, it is in part an attempt, to conserve the fund of general meanings in terms of which each individual interprets his experience and organizes his conduct.' Interpreting experience and organizing conduct, that's living. Religion is (among other things) a way of coping with life's problems. If religion is about the problems of life (i.e. ought problems) then might science necessarily miss what is most important about religion? Part of the pull towards a more scientific study of religion comes from a desire to be empirical, to study people and texts that proclaim things invisible, and so we want to keep ourselves tethered to reality. As opposed to cognitive science, this paper will suggest that the ordinary language philosophy of J. L. Austin et al. is a more fruitful empirical method for the study of religion.

Bimbo Stanley Omopo (*University of St Andrews*) The "Us" and "Them" Divide: Rethinking the Role of Young People in Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

As a value-based problem, religious conflicts are disruptive and protracted. Indeed, Nigeria has experienced a plethora of protracted religious conflicts since independence in 1960. Constituting major actors in these conflicts are young people, who play critical roles in fomenting and escalating them. Although extant literature acknowledges this preponderant place of young people in these conflicts, it tends to negate the potential constructive roles they play in managing the conflicts. This paper explores the disruptive and potential constructive roles of the youths as principal actors in religious conflicts in Nigeria. It argues that if armed with the right education on peace and tolerance, young people can play critical preventive and curative roles in religious conflict theaters in Nigeria. Exploring these youths' strengths is pertinent for a multidimensional approach to addressing religious conflicts and violence in Nigeria.

Joel Stoker (*Elmira College*) The Use of Popular Culture in Pedagogy for the Modern Religious Studies Student: Case Studies in Classroom Experimentation

The use of popular culture in Religious Studies education is not new. Yet the incorporation of elements of popular culture into the contemporary classroom seems more requisite than ever before. Changes in the student population including generational religious knowledge, demographic shifts, globalization, social and political polarization, and differing learning styles may all contribute to a widening gap in Religious Studies education. Testing the educational value of elements of popular culture in the Religious Studies classroom represents an understudied pedagogical arena. This study aims to explore the ideological and experimental implementation of popular culture into four different Religious Studies classrooms including 1- Religion and Popular Culture, 2- World Religions, 3- Ancient Religions, and 4- Indigenous Religions. Though these course offerings represent only a singular instructor's foray into the incorporation

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of increased amounts of elements of popular culture in the Religious Studies classroom, it invites additional pedagogical exploration into the effectiveness of shifts in the modern college curriculum and classroom.