



# 2026 ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, May 30, 2026 - Monday, June 1, 2026  
St. John's College, University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

## CSSR Annual Meeting 2026 – Essential Information

The **CSSR Annual Meeting** will be held at **St. John's College, University of Manitoba, from Saturday, May 30 to Monday, June 1, 2026.**

This year, CSSR is holding its annual meeting outside of Congress and in conjunction with the Canadian-American Theological Association (CATA), Canadian Society of Church History (CSCH), and the Canadian Theological Society (CTS).

This year's theme, ***Common Places, Contested Spaces: Religion in Canada and Beyond***, invites participants to reflect on how place and context shape religious traditions and the study of religion more broadly.

### Attending the Annual Meeting

All presentations will take place at **St. John's College – Fort Garry Campus – at the University of Manitoba** (see the Program Schedule for specific room numbers).

### Registration

All participants and attendees must register in advance using the following link: <https://umanitoba.ca/st-johns-college/form/the-canadian-theological-and-rel>

Please note that all participants and attendees are required to register and pay the conference fee of \$100. The registration fee includes daily lunch, as well as tea and coffee service.

We kindly ask that you complete your registration at your earliest convenience to assist us with planning.

### Presentation Schedule

**Time:** 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM (see Program for more details)

**Breaks:** Scheduled throughout the day for networking, lunch, and wellness. Coffee and tea will be available on site.

**Lunch:** Lunch will be provided to all registered members.

## Accommodations

Dorm accommodations will be available at St. John's College. Members can indicate their interest by selecting the dorm option on the registration form. We expect to know by April 1 how many rooms are available, and those who selected this option will be contacted to register on a first-come, first-served basis.


Some nearby hotel options at a range of price points include:

- The Queen Bee Hotel
- The Four Points Sheraton
- The Comfort Inn South
- Canad Inn
- Holiday Inn Pembina

## Getting to the Venue – Public Transit

St. John's College – Fort Garry Campus is primarily served by Winnipeg Transit via the Blue Rapid Transit Line, 47 and 60 routes, offering direct routes from downtown.

Use the [Winnipeg Transit Navigo](#) tool to plan specific trips, routes and schedules.

 More transit info: [Winnipeg Transit](#)

## AV Options and Your Presentation

Meeting rooms are accessible and equipped with:

- ✓ **Computer (with Windows operating system) with internet access**
- ✓ **Screen & projector**
- ✓ **HDMI cable**

 Important Notes:

- Bring a **printed copy** of your presentation and/or outline.
- Have your **presentation saved on a USB stick** as a backup.
- **Mac users:** Ensure slides are on a **compatible USB** and bring any necessary dongles.

Please **arrive early** to set up your presentation before your session begins.

## Internet Access

Wi-Fi is available via **Eduroam**.

## CSSR Annual General Meeting (AGM)

**Date:** Saturday, May 30, 2026

**Time:** 4:30 PM – 5:30 PM

 **Location:** Schultz Lecture Theatre (Room 172)

- ◆ **Open to all CSSR members** – Your participation is encouraged!
- ◆ **Discussion:** the future of religion programs in Canada and the future of CSSR
- ◆ **Elections** will be held for open positions on the CSSR Executive Board.
- ◆ **Why attend?**
  - Have your voice heard and cast your vote
  - Meet the current Executive team
  - Learn how CSSR is working for you

## CSSR Social

Co-Sponsored by **Canadian Corporation for the Study of Religion**

**Date:** Saturday, May 30, 2026

**Time:** 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

 **Location:** Galleria

- ◆ **Open to all CSSR and CCSR members**
- ◆ **Refreshments will be served**

A special thank you to the Canadian Corporation for the Study of Religion, for their generous sponsorship of the CSSR Social.

## CSSR President's Reception

Co-Sponsored by the University of Winnipeg's Department of Religion and Culture and Graduate Studies and the University of Manitoba's Department of Religion

**Date:** Sunday, May 31, 2026

**Time:** 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

 **Location:** Galleria

◆ **Open to all CSSR members, including CATA, CSCH, and CTS members**

### **Highlights:**

- Presentation of the **CSSR Book Prize** and **Student Awards**
- Complimentary **drink and hors d'oeuvres**
- A chance to celebrate and connect with fellow members

A special thank you to the University of Winnipeg's Department of Religion and Culture and UW Graduate Studies, as well as the University of Manitoba's Department of Religion, for their generous sponsorship of the CSSR President's Reception.

## St. John's College Presents: Wilmot Lecture & Reception

**Date:** Monday, June 1, 2026

### Wilmont Lecture

**Time:** 4:30 PM – 5:30 PM

 **Location:** Robert Schultz Lecture Theatre

◆ **Speaker: Dr. Justin Stratis**

### Wilmont Reception

**Time:** 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

 **Location:** Galleria

◆ **Open to all CSSR members, including CATA, CSCH, and CTS members**

## Questions or Comments About the Program

**Contact Program Chair:** Alyshea Cummins

 Email: [programchairs@cssrscer.ca](mailto:programchairs@cssrscer.ca)

 Visit our **Annual Meeting page** for updates: [CSSR Website](#)

## SHORT PROGRAM

### Saturday, May 30

9:00-10:30am		CSSR Executive Meeting (Closed to Executive Committee Members)
10:30-12:00pm	Room 201	Session: Superheroes, Witches, and Common Sense: Religion, Power, and Popular Media
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch Break	
1:00-2:30pm	Room 201	Roundtable: Emerging Sikh Solidarities in Early Twenty-first Century Canada: Part 2
	Room 202	Roundtable: Charting the History of Muslims in Canada
2:30-3:00pm	Afternoon Break	
3:00-4:30pm	Room 201	Roundtable: Translating Psychedelic Experiences: Making Meaning Across Religious, Clinical, and Communal Contexts
	Room 202	Session: Religion, the State, and Secular Governance
4:30-5:30pm	Schultz Lecture Theatre (Room 172)	CSSR Annual General Meeting
5:30-7:30pm	Galleria	CSSR Social (Co-Sponsored by Canadian Corporation for the Study of Religion)

### Sunday, May 31

8:30-10:00am	Room 201	Session: Sacred Space, Authority, and Political Power
	Room 202	Session: Religion, Technology, and the Question of AI

10:00-10:30am	Morning Break	
10:30 am-12:00pm	Room 201	Session: Religion, Economy, and Ethical Reasoning
	Room 202	Session: Religious Nationalisms in Comparative Perspective: Christianity, Judaism, and the Politics of Belonging
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch Break	
		CSSR Graduate Student Lunch
1:00-2:30pm	Room 201	Session: Religion and the Secular
	Room 202	Roundtable: Identity and Religion   Relations and Place (IRRP): Round Table
2:30-3:00pm	Afternoon Break	
3:00-4:30pm	Room 201	Roundtable: The State of Religion Programs in Canada
5:00-7:00pm	Galleria	CSSR President's Reception (Co-Sponsored by the University of Winnipeg's Department of Religion and Culture and Graduate Studies, and the University of Manitoba's Department of Religion)

## Monday, June 1

8:30-10:00am	Room 201	Session: Digital Religion in Practice: Ethnography, Community, and Political Meaning
	Room 202	Session: Teaching Religion in the Age of AI: Pedagogical Strategies and Embodied Learning
10:00-10:30am	Morning Break	
10:30 am-12:00pm	Room 201	Session: Knowledge, Epistemology, and the Study of Religion
	Room 202	Session: Contested Sacred Spaces: Legitimacy, Protest, and Offense in Contemporary Religion

12:00-1:00pm	Lunch Break	
1:00-2:30pm	Room 201	Roundtable: Indigenous Spiritual Biography as the Matrix for Truth and Reconciliation
	Room 202	Roundtable: Coursework in a Dangerous Time

4:30-5:30pm	St John's College Presents: Wilmot Lecture (CSSR members are invited to attend)	
5:30-7:30pm	Wilmont Reception (CSSR members are invited to attend)	

## FULL PROGRAM

**Saturday, May 30**

Time	Location	Session Title	Participants and Presentation Titles
9:00-10:30am		CSSR Executive Meeting	Closed to Executive Committee Members
10:30-12:00pm	Room 201 (Hybrid)	Session: Superheroes, Witches, and Common Sense: Religion, Power, and Popular Media	<p><b>Chair:</b> Nicole Goulet</p> <p><b>Presenters:</b>  Mary Hale, "An Atheist, A Superhero, and a Wee Italian Marxist Walked into My Classroom: Empathy, Religious Imagination, and Social Change"   Grace Richards, "Challenging and Reinforcing the Cauldron: Witchcraft, Feminism, and Consumer Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer"</p>

			Ryan Jones, “Truth, Justice, and A Better Tomorrow – How Superman Embodies a Theology of Sound”
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch Break		
1:00-2:30pm	Room 201	Roundtable: Emerging Sikh Solidarities in Early Twenty-first Century Canada: Part 2	<b>Moderator:</b> Zabeen Khamisa <b>Participants:</b> Zabeen Khamisa, Rupee Kahlon, Amardeep Kaur, Sharanpal Ruprai
	Room 202	Roundtable: Charting the History of Muslims in Canada	<b>Moderator:</b> Aaron Hughes <b>Participants:</b> Aaron Hughes, Alyshea Cummins, Jennifer Selby, Matt Sheedy
2:30-3:00pm	Afternoon Break		
3:00-4:30pm	Room 201	Roundtable: Translating Psychedelic Experiences: Making Meaning Across Religious, Clinical, and Communal Contexts	<b>Moderator:</b> Reid Barber <b>Participants:</b> Bridget Thompson, Keren Gottfried, Nathan Springer, Reid Barber, Victor Distefano Wiltenburg, Wallace Murray
	Room 202	Session: Religion, the State, and Secular Governance	<b>Chair:</b> Kyuhoon Cho <b>Presenters:</b> Usmon Boron, “Secularism and Islamophobia: A View from Central Asia”

			<p>Eve Sotiriadou, “Contested Classrooms: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Politics of Inclusion in Manitoba K–12 Schools”</p> <p>Jennifer Selby, Amélie Barras, Dia Dabby. “When Laïcité is Interjected: A Manufactured Scandal in a Montréal Public School”</p>
4:30-5:30pm	Schultz Lecture Theatre (Room 172)	CSSR Annual General Meeting (AGM)	
5:30-7:30pm	Galleria	CSSR Social (co-sponsored by Canadian Corporation of Study of Religion)	

## Sunday, May 31

Time	Location	Session Title	Participants and Presentation Titles
8:30am-10:00am	Room 201 (Hybrid)	Session: Sacred Space, Authority, and Political Power	<p><b>Chair:</b> Zea Jones</p> <p><b>Presenters:</b></p> <p>Todd Kaiman, “Governing the Sacred: Space, Authority, and Belonging in Modern Chinese Buddhism”</p> <p>Lu Wang, “The Missionary as Moral Agent in a Militarized Colonial Order: Rethinking Just War, Empire, and Theological Ethics in Late Qing Formosa” (virtual)</p>

			Clara A.B Joseph, "When Decolonialism Repeats the Colonial Script: Christianity, Misrecognition, and Epistemic Violence"
	Room 202	Session: Religion, Technology, and the Question of AI	<b>Chair:</b> Kyuhoon Cho <b>Presenters:</b> Matt Sheedy, "Religious Studies and AI: What's at Stake, and What Can We Do?"  Earnest "Ejay" Tupe, "Spiritual Discernment in a Technological Society"
10:00-10:30am	Morning Break		
10:30am-12:00pm	Room 201 (Hybrid)	Session: Religion, Economy, and Ethical Reasoning	<b>Chair:</b> C. William Campbell <b>Presenters:</b> Kyuhoon Cho, "Inter Asian Religious-Secular Interactions: The Halal System and Southeast Asian Muslims' Experiences in a Globalized Korea"  C. William Campbell, "Revelatory Economics"  Seyed Hossein Hosseini Nassab, "Debt, Housing, and Belonging: Islamic Finance in North America's Contested Regulatory Spaces" (virtual)
	Room 202	Session: Religious Nationalisms in Comparative	<b>Chair:</b> Alyshea Cummins <b>Presenters:</b>

		Perspective: Christianity, Judaism, and the Politics of Belonging	Amarnath Amarasingam, "Christian Nationalism in Canada: Findings from a General Population Survey"  Lisa Gasson-Gardner & Corinne Mason, "Parental Rights in 'God's Dominion:' A Case Study in Canadian Christian Nationalism"  Justin Jaron Lewis, "Hasidic Tales of Zionism"
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch Break		
1:00-2:30pm	Room 201 (Hybrid)	Session: Religion and the Secular	<b>Chair:</b> Earnest Tupe  <b>Presenters:</b> Aashi Jain, "Dying Otherwise: Religious Ethics and Secular Authority at the End of Life"  Carol Duncan, "Di More Yuh Look, Di Less Yuh See: Caribbean Proverbs, Pedagogy and Religious Studies" (virtual)
	Room 202	Roundtable: Identity and Religion: Relations and Place (IRRP)	<b>Moderator:</b> Paul Gareau  <b>Participants:</b> Paul Gareau, Joseph Wiebe, Rubina Ramji, Carlos Colorado, Alyshea Cummins, Aaron Hughes
2:30-3:00pm	Afternoon Break		

3:00-4:30pm	Room 201 (Hybrid)	Roundtable: The State of Religion Programs in Canada	<b>Moderator:</b> Rubina Ramji  <b>Participants:</b> Alison Marshall, Pamela Klassen, Mikaël Bauer, Scott Kline, Tinu Ruparell, Rachel Yakimishen
5:00-7:00pm	Galleria	CSSR President's Reception (co-sponsored by University of Manitoba's Department of Religion and University of Winnipeg's Department of Religion and Culture and Graduate Studies)	

## Monday, June 2

Time	Location	Session Title	Participants and Presentation Titles
8:30-10:00am	Room 201 (Hybrid)	Session: Digital Religion in Practice: Ethnography, Community, and Political Meaning	<b>Chair:</b> Zabeen Khamisa  <b>Presenters:</b> Kimberly Yang, "Reconceptualizing the Margins of Religious Migration: The Localization of Montreal's Gong Tian Gong Canada Mazu Temple"  Carla Louca, "The Digital Altar: Practicing Political Theology in North American 'WitchTok'"
	Room 202  Open to all Societies	Session: Teaching Religion in the Age of AI: Pedagogical Strategies and Embodied Learning	<b>Chair:</b> David O'Reilly  <b>Presenters:</b> Noel Salmond, "Teaching Religion in the Academy in the Age of AI"

			<p>Yongshan He, “Embodied Inquiry: Bridging Student Practice with East Asian Religious Traditions”</p> <p>Danielle Dubois, “Fostering Critical Thinking Skills in Religion Courses”</p>
10:00-10:30am	Morning Break		
10:30am-12:00pm	Room 201	<p>Session: Contested Sacred Spaces: Legitimacy, Protest, and Offense in Contemporary Religion</p>	<p><b>Chair:</b> Justin Lewis</p> <p><b>Presenters:</b>  Zéa Jones, “Blasphemous, Obscene Trash: Art Vandalism and Contemporary Religious Art”</p> <p>Patricia Dold, “Pilgrimage and Protest”</p> <p>David O’Reilly, “Political Heathens: The Battle for Religious Legitimacy by Two Germanic New Religious Movements”</p>
	Room 202	<p>Session: Knowledge, Epistemology, and the Study of Religion</p>	<p><b>Chair:</b></p> <p><b>Presenters:</b>  Muhammad Samiullah, “Epistemic Hierarchies in Risālah al-Funūn: Shah Waliullah’s Post-Classical Theory of Knowledge”</p> <p>David Drewes, “Interpreting Enlightenment and Buddhist Studies as a ‘Bizarro World’”</p> <p>Catherine van Reenen, “Materialization Mediums and Other (Spiritualist) Media”</p>

12:00-1:00pm	Lunch Break		
1:00-2:30pm	Room 201	Roundtable: Indigenous Spiritual Biography as the Matrix for Truth and Reconciliation	<b>Moderator:</b> Mark Ruml <b>Participants:</b> Mark Ruml, Shane Patterson, Jason Bone, Charlene Moore, Farrah Murdock
	Room 202  Open to all societies	Roundtable: Coursework in a Dangerous Time	<b>Moderator:</b> Nicole Goulet <b>Participants:</b> Kenneth MacKendrick, Ainsley Brennan, Catherine van Reenan, Kathy Block, Nicole Goulet

## INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

Aashi Jain, University of Winnipeg

**Paper Title: Dying Otherwise: Religious Ethics and Secular Authority at the End of Life**

End-of-life decision-making has become a prominent site of ethical, legal, and cultural contestation in contemporary societies. In Canada, Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) operates within state-regulated medical and legal frameworks that frame death through autonomy, choice, and procedural governance. At the same time, religious traditions continue to articulate alternative moral grammars of dying whose authority does not derive from secular institutions. This paper examines end-of-life care as a contested institutional and epistemic space by placing MAID in dialogue with the Jain practice of Sallekhana, a ritualized fast unto death grounded in ascetic discipline, ethical self-restraint, and religious cosmology.

Drawing on comparative religious ethics and theories of secularism, the paper argues that these practices embody competing understandings of agency, suffering, dignity, and moral authority. While MAID is embedded within shared public institutions such as hospitals and courts, Sallekhana locates ethical legitimacy within religious community and practice, challenging the assumptions that underwrite dominant secular bioethical discourse. By examining how these frameworks intersect and diverge, the paper demonstrates how religious studies scholarship can illuminate contested public debates about death, pluralism, and moral authority in Canada and beyond.

Amarnath Amarasingam, Queen's University

**Paper Title: "Christian Nationalism in Canada: Findings from a General Population Survey"**

This paper presents findings from a national Canadian survey (N = 1,204) examining public support for Christian nationalist beliefs. The survey included multiple items measuring agreement with statements such as whether Canada was founded as a Christian nation, whether true Canadian identity is tied to Christian heritage, whether the decline of Christian influence is harming the country, and whether the federal government should promote Christian values or formally declare Canada a Christian nation. The analysis describes overall levels of agreement with Christian nationalist statements and then overlays these attitudes with respondents' sex, age, and self-reported political orientation on a left–right scale. This allows for an examination of how Christian nationalism varies across demographic and ideological groups. The paper focuses on identifying which segments of the population are most likely to support Christian nationalist views and how these patterns relate to broader political identity in Canada.

C. William Campbell, University of Victoria

**Paper Title: Revelatory Economics**

This paper introduces "revelatory economics" through an ethnographic analysis of how Latter-day Saints in southern Alberta reason about economic decisions. I show that in the LDS context, economic decision making is organized around the conscious use of a technique for discerning what action is prudent, revelation. This technique draws on a shared understanding of the self "as gods in embryo," oriented toward exaltation, an LDS form of theosis. Through the pursuit of

revelation, choices are rendered not simply correct or incorrect, but prudent in a way that aligns with who one already understands oneself to be and is striving to be more fully.

Out of this case, I develop revelatory economics as a broader analytic. Revelatory economics names forms of economic reasoning in which conscious discernment practices simultaneously rely on, disclose, and cultivate an innate-yet-aspirational subjectivity, making prudence a matter of self-revelation as much as calculation.

### Carla Louca, Bishop's University

#### **Paper Title: The Digital Altar: Practicing Political Theology in North American “WitchTok”**

Digital esotericism seems, *prima facie*, to be much the same across the globe, with heavy emphasis on divination, employing natural objects for magical purposes, and performing manifestation rituals. The teleology of these practices, however, is in fact vastly different when compared across national borders. In this paper, it will be argued that North American “WitchTok” influencers (specifically, in Canada and the United States) are engaging in political theology designed to respond to their distinctive (and discrepant) national and sociological challenges. Using a comparative discourse analysis, I will highlight a contrast in the use of the digital space between, on the one hand, Canadian WitchTok collectivist ethics and ecological-stewardship concerns and, on the other, American WitchTok individualistic responses to perceived institutional decay. By viewing digital religious practices as an “anxiety mirror”, this paper will demonstrate how modern magical practitioners are theologizing the political to navigate the differing concerns of their nations/societies.

### Carol Duncan, Wilfred Laurier University

#### **Paper Title: Di More Yuh Look, Di Less Yuh See: Caribbean Proverbs, Pedagogy and Religious Studies**

Di more yuh look, di less yuh see (the more you look, the less you see). Sayings known as “proverbs,” have emerged as a crucial part of Caribbean oral and literary traditions. They pop up in conversations, storytelling, and writing produced by Caribbean people in the region and its diaspora. Caribbean proverbs impart practical lessons for everyday life but also offer reflections on knowledge production. Often regarded as humour, or a marker of bygone generations from the colonial era, proverbs are a repository of collective wisdom. They emerged from navigating the complex terrain of colonialism and parsing these experiences into oral sayings. With reference to specific examples, this paper will examine the meanings of Caribbean proverbs and their significance for religious studies pedagogy. The focus of proverbs on power dynamics within colonial contexts offer insight for teaching religious studies in Canada given the country’s own colonial legacies.

### Catherine van Reenan, University of Manitoba

#### **Paper Title: Materialization Mediums and Other (Spiritualist) Media**

The common image of a Spiritualist medium is a gifted person—usually a woman—through whom the spirits speak. However, there were also, *inter alia*, writing mediums, drawing mediums, healing mediums, and, starting in the early 1870s, materialization mediums. In this

latter 'phase' of mediumship, immaterial 'spirit forms' were temporarily reincarnated in the séance room where they touched, tickled, and tantalized sitters. These (re)materialized spirits proved especially controversial not only among Spiritualism's critics but also within its ranks. Curiously, materialization's controversial status persists in the secondary scholarship on Spiritualism in which the practice has been characterized as especially strange or spectacular in comparison to other techniques of mediumship. This presentation explores the question of why materialization mediums have proven so vexing not only to nineteenth-century Spiritualists, but also among historians of the movement.'

**Clara A.B. Joseph, University of Calgary**

**Paper Title: When Decolonialism Repeats the Colonial Script: Christianity, Misrecognition, and Epistemic Violence**

Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship has played a vital role in exposing Christianity's entanglement with European imperial power. This paper argues, however, that such critique often inherits an unexamined assumption: that Christianity is, by definition, a European and therefore colonial religion. Drawing on critical genealogies of religion (Asad; Masuzawa) and theories of epistemic violence (Spivak; Fricker), the paper shows how this assumption reproduces a colonial classificatory framework even within decolonial discourse. Focusing on the misrecognition of ancient Eastern Christian traditions, particularly the Thomas Christians of India, it demonstrates how historically rooted, pre-colonial Christian communities become conceptually unintelligible when Christianity is treated solely as a colonial instrument. The paper advances a meta-disciplinary critique of how "religion" functions as a common place within contemporary scholarship, obscuring internal diversity and historical plurality. It calls for greater epistemic precision in the study of religion and its public interpretations.

**Danielle Dubois, University of Manitoba**

**Paper Title: Fostering Critical Thinking Skills in Religion Courses**

Students are using GenAI tools. In many cases, these tools are being introduced by the university itself. Preliminary research is showing that the unreflective use of AI by students and the limited ability of instructors to regulate its use is having a significant impact on students' critical thinking skills. Supported by an Arts Faculty grant, I worked with two student research assistants to elaborate strategies around AI-free zones, and to examine alternative assessment models. The goal of AI-free zones is to create space for deep thinking while alternative assessment models focus on student learning acquisition (or lack thereof) rather than AI-policing. This presentation shares key findings and recommendations for implementing AI-free assignments, and discusses how alternative AI-free assignments and alternate assessment models can be introduced to students to foster engagement.

**David Drewes, University of Manitoba**

**Paper Title: Interpreting Enlightenment and Buddhist Studies as a "Bizarro World"**

Scholars have interpreted the early Buddhist idea of enlightenment in different ways. Early scholars read stories of his enlightenment as a mythologized accounts of a period when the supposedly historical Buddha struggled with doubt or temptation, or simply thought up his

philosophy. In the wake of the work of D.T. Suzuki, scholars took a new approach, and read the texts as mythologized accounts of a replicable, ineffable, transformative, religious, or mystical, experience, an interpretation that remains widely current today. This paper considers the philological and historical bases for this interpretation and the influence it has had on general understandings of early Buddhism. It argues that it is based on little more than fancy, and that, to the extent that it permits and perpetuates such interpretations, the field of Buddhist studies has become, to borrow the phrase of Michael Clune, “a kind of twilight zone . . . a bizarro world.”

**David O’Reilly, University of Ottawa**

**Paper Title: Political Heathens: The Battle for Religious Legitimacy by Two Germanic New Religious Movements**

“Heathenry” is the most common umbrella term for New Religious Movements (NRMs) which take inspiration from pre-Christian Germanic mythology, having adherents from both racist and radically inclusive communities. Their religious label, “Heathen”, is now being fought for by North American organizations with diametrically opposed beliefs on racial and sexual diversity. The premier voice for racist Heathenry is the well-established Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA), a white supremacist group based in the US with international presence. The Heathen Confederation of Canada (HCC) is a relatively new not-for-profit organization advocating for Inclusive Heathenry across the nation. The HCC is constructing a decentralized organization and representative voice for Inclusive Heathens, while the AFA takes a more traditional approach to religious practice with its operation of five “hofs” (churches). Focusing on these two organizations as case studies, this talk will discuss how these groups vie for legal and social legitimacy amid external pressures and stigma.

**Earnest “Ejay” Tupe, Toronto School of Theology**

**Paper Title: Spiritual Discernment in a Technological Society**

This paper navigates the intersection of religion and contemporary culture by analyzing the architecture of Artificial Intelligence and its ecosystem as the ultimate manifestation of Jacques Ellul’s Technique. Ellul defined Technique as the autonomous force of efficiency reshaping all human activity; today, this is realized through algorithmic systems that prioritize engagement over truth. The study investigates how this AI-driven environment and social media as possible catalytic agents in the curation of “digital noise,” that has the potentiality of perpetuating a state of mass psychosis by detaching individuals from shared reality and communal grounding. The paper argues for the urgent development of a Spiritual Discernment framework. By retrieving traditional practices of discernment, this research offers a theological and practical method for cutting through the cacophony of the digital era, allowing for the preservation of human agency and the cultivation of genuine spiritual clarity amidst the determinism of the technological society.

Eve Sotiriadou, Queen's University

**Paper Title: Contested Classrooms: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Politics of Inclusion in Manitoba K–12 Schools**

Anti-Muslim racism has rendered Manitoba K to 12 schools contested spaces, where students are encouraged to flourish while often being expected to leave religious identities at the schoolyard. Drawing on my 2022 community-based research with 190 participants, of whom 62 per cent reported experiences of Islamophobia, 73 per cent of whom were women, and 43 per cent of incidents occurring in school settings, this paper examines the development of the MIA Anti Islamophobia Toolkit for Manitoba educators. The toolkit integrates religious studies scholarship with applied pedagogy through lesson plans, English and French literature recommendations, virtual resources for Grades 6 to 12, Ramadan and Eid materials, and Manitoba-based community resources.

Provincial endorsement of the toolkit contributed to the establishment of the Manitoba Anti-Islamophobia Working Group and the 2026 Action Plan, illustrating how scholarship grounded in everyday experiences can inform policy-level interventions. While early uptake has been substantial, systematic implementation and evaluation remain underdeveloped. The presentation advances a community-driven evaluation framework and outlines pathways for province-wide scaling, highlighting the role of applied religious studies in strengthening inclusive education in Canada.

Grace Richards, Carleton University

**Paper Title: Challenging and Reinforcing the Cauldron: Witchcraft, Feminism, and Consumer Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer**

As a pillar of late 20th-century popular culture, Buffy the Vampire Slayer drew in mass audiences with its tantalizing depiction of cultic practices, including witchcraft. Despite the show's feminist themes, Buffy's depiction of witchcraft offers viewers a politically ambivalent portrait of female power. While the series challenges historical witchcraft stereotypes, reclaiming magic as a potent tool for female agency, collective action, and the construction of non-normative identities, it simultaneously reinforces damaging tropes of magic as an inherently corrupting, emotionally volatile, and dangerous force that threatens social order. This ambivalence is not an oversight; rather, it functions as a quintessential case study of the contradictions underlying post-feminist, neoliberal culture at the turn of the 21st century, and how witchcraft continues to be used as a tool to grapple with the threat female power poses to patriarchal institutions. Moreover, it provides an excellent case study for examining how media popularized spirituality.

Jennifer Selby, Memorial University

Amélie Barras, York University

Dia Dabby, Université du Québec à Montréal

**Paper Title: When Laïcité is Interjected: A Manufactured Scandal in a Montréal Public School**

In 2023, work conditions in a Montréal public elementary school were described as a “scandal” by politicians and the press. Originating in a seven-year toxic workplace dispute initially framed by the school board as a labour law issue, the situation was reframed in the Journal de Montréal as one of problematic religious entrisism and extremism. We show how this shift legitimated laïcité

as the tool to restore “law and order” in the school and, more broadly, in Québec’s public sphere. This reframing occurred despite existing labour law protections and a recently adopted, though contested, bolstering of laïcité with Law 21. Drawing on media analysis of the 2023–2025 “Bedford School Affair,” this paper examines the initial framing of the issue in five English- and French-language newspapers, traces the actors and processes behind its transformation, and analyzes how this shift bolstered a significant expansion of laïcité through new legislative measures.

**Justin Jaron Lewis, University of Manitoba**

**Paper Title: Hasidic Tales of Zionism**

Among the world’s most contested places is the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan. In Jewish religious spaces today, events there, and world-wide reactions, are a source of anguish. Religiously affiliated Jews tell clashing stories: for the majority, Israeli Jews feature as heroes and victims; for a growing minority, those are the roles of Palestinians. Alternative perspectives are in short supply; scholars too may feel compelled to choose sides and dig in.

Going beyond the mainstream, to communities considered extremist, and beyond English and Hebrew sources, can unearth different ways of thinking. This paper will look at stories about Zionism that are told in Hasidic Yiddish-language publications (e.g. Mallos magazine) and internet forums (e.g. ivelt.com). These stories stand apart from humanism or nationalism. The paper will show that this traditionalist worldview sustains political conversations that are more diverse, and often more reasonable, than what emerges from the prevalent polarization.

**Kimberly Yang, McGill University**

**Paper Title: Reconceptualizing the Margins of Religious Migration: The Localization of Montreal’s Gong Tian Gong Canada Mazu Temple**

The worship of Mazu the Chinese sea goddess stands out as an enduring religious figure that, once rooted in coastal China, has been increasingly shaped by two phenomena: the mobilization of digital platforms to (re)transform transnational Mazu networks and the growth of Mazu communities in North America. Drawing upon participant observation & digital ethnography, this paper examines Chinese diasporic religious life through an ethnographic study of Mazu worship in North America, focusing on how digital mediation reshapes diasporic belonging, ritual efficacy, and resilience. Notably, I use the Gong Tian Gong Canada Temple in Montreal, Quebec as a case study. While Montreal is a distinctively unique site, given Quebec’s secular regulatory frameworks, it also raises questions on how religious studies can begin reconceptualizing the margins of diasporic, religious practice not as diluted extensions of homeland-host binaries, but as productive sites of religious retransformation shaped by localized and digitally mediated engagements.

**Kyunhoon Cho, The University of Regina**

**Paper Title: Inter Asian Religious-Secular Interactions: The Halal System and Southeast Asian Muslims’ Experiences in a Globalized Korea**

In this presentation, I aim to explore religio-cultural interactions across Asia with a focus on halal experiences in contemporary South Korea. After looking into the current state of Muslim

minorities in South Korea, I will first examine the Korean halal certification system. Emphasis is placed on major Korean halal certification bodies and how they have made the Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) with foreign halal certification bodies such as JAKIM from Malaysia, BPJPH from Indonesia, and MoIAT from the United Arab Emirates. Secondly, I explore everyday halal practices among Southeast Asian Muslim visitors, including Indonesian and Malaysian students and tourists. It has been reported that, as South Korea is a ‘non-Muslim society’, Southeast Asian tourists and students have experienced challenges in complying with halal principles. Finally, I attempt to grasp the implications of the halal practices and the growing demand for Korean halal food in contemporary Korean and other Asian societies.

**Lisa Gasson-Gardner & Corinne Mason, Mount Royal University**

**Paper Title: Parental Rights in “God’s Dominion:” A Case Study in Canadian Christian Nationalism**

In Alberta, Christian nationalists (CN)—people who blur the lines between their Canadian and Christian identities—have successfully advocated for parental choice laws and regulations targeting trans and gender diverse youth, inclusive sexual education, and “sexually explicit” books in K-12 schools. Using the Alberta parental rights movement as a case study, we propose a framework to define and study CN in Canada. By centering the activist groups that mediate between Christian communities and politicians, we locate mechanisms that facilitate identification with CN: fear that society is in decline, and anxiety that “traditional” powers, like patriarchy, are failing. These affect-laden points of connection allow people to support “common sense” projects like “protecting the children” without understanding the full ideological picture. While presented as benign, Canadian CN poses a direct threat to civil religion—the shared stories, symbols, and values that bind together a pluralist society.

**Lu Wang, Knox College, University of Toronto**

**Paper Title: The Missionary as Moral Agent in a Militarized Colonial Order: Rethinking Just War, Empire, and Theological Ethics in Late Qing Formosa**

This paper examines the ethical dilemmas faced by Presbyterian missionaries George Leslie Mackay and Thomas Barclay during the militarized transitions of late Qing Formosa (Taiwan). Drawing on Michael Walzer’s critique of Just War theory, it explores how theological convictions shaped missionary responses to violence, empire, and colonial transformation. While both men claimed political neutrality, their reliance on imperial protection—symbolized by the British flag—reveals the moral ambiguities of mission under empire. Mackay’s strategic neutrality and Barclay’s mediation during Japan’s 1895 occupation of Tainan exemplify how faith-driven actions could both save lives and stabilize colonial power. Integrating insights from Reformed theology, postcolonial ethics, and comparative religious critique, this study argues that missionary witness in wartime Formosa functioned as an “impossible negotiation” between conscience and complicity. It concludes by calling for a de-imperialized theological ethics attentive to structural power, historical context, and the politics of moral agency.

Mary Hale, Saint Mary's University

**Paper Title: An Atheist, A Superhero, And a Wee Italian Marxist Walked into My Classroom: Empathy, Religious Imagination, and Social Change**

A paucity of experience with lived religion often presents itself in the religious studies classroom as bewilderment or hostility towards the idea that anyone would choose of their own free will to embrace a religious worldview. Using the “What if...” television series in the Marvel Cinematic Universe as a starting point, this paper explores the use of popular culture and Gramscian conceptions of common sense narratives as gateways for helping religious “nones” understand religious development and internal diversity. The development of empathy for the religious imagination is then explored as a tool for reconceptualizing religion, particularly new or marginalized religions, as examples of social possibilities (Feltmate, 2016), making the argument that framing NRMs as such assists students to examine religion in all its configurations and social ramifications with nuance and empathy.

Matt Sheedy, University of Manitoba

**Paper Title: Religious Studies and AI: What’s at Stake, and What Can We Do?**

This paper addresses a variety of challenges facing the study of religion in light of developments in AI technologies. While some scholars have been able to adapt their teaching and research to these rapidly changing technologies, and a select few have been fortunate to ground their research in this area, the majority are caught somewhere in between. In this paper, I outline a broad range of work on AI, both within and outside of religious studies, in order to demarcate the scope of academic and non-academic fields, interests (financial, ethical, epistemological, and existential), and topics that have been addressed. My aim, in short, is to present a basic ‘state of the art,’ of religion and AI and offer some preliminary thoughts on where these discussions may go in the future and what role scholars at different career stages might play in this uncharted environment.

Muhammad Samiullah, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

**Paper Title: Epistemic Hierarchies in Risālah al-Funūn: Shah Waliullah’s Post-Classical Theory of Knowledge**

This paper reconstructs Shah Waliullah’s epistemology in *Risālah al-Funūn*, arguing that it offers a refined post-classical reformulation of medieval Abrahamic debates on knowledge hierarchies. His noetic system—based on the gradation of ‘aql kasbī (discursive intellect) and ‘aql wahbī (illuminative intellect)—reworks the *falāsifa*’s models of cognition while engaging Ash‘arī dialectics and Sufi metaphysics. Through close analysis, the study shows that *Risālah al-Funūn* outlines a multilayered framework: sensory perception (*idrāk ḥissī*), rational abstraction (*tafkīk ‘aqlī*), metaphysical intellection (*ta‘aqqul*), and supra-rational unveiling (*kashf*). This hierarchy is teleological, linking epistemology to human perfection and a metaphysics of emanation that places Shah Waliullah in conversation with Maimonides and Aquinas. His synthesis of reason, theology, and illumination anticipates later thinkers like Mullā Ṣadrā while maintaining a distinctly Sunnī scriptural orientation.

### Noel Salmond, Carleton University

#### **Paper Title: Teaching Religion in the Academy in the Age of AI**

All disciplines in the Humanities have been rocked or ravaged by the arrival of AI and what this means for teaching and assessment. I examine articles published in response by scholars within religious studies and in cognate disciplines. I examine calls for a more contemplative and low-tech approach to learning and teaching (a “Luddite pedagogy”) as opposed to the wholesale embrace of technology and its delivery of evermore information capped now by its capacity to generate entire papers. Calls for an academy as cloister rather than tech hub, I suggest, have a certain curious overlap with the position that religious studies can actually be religious – a position furiously debated in our field perhaps especially in the 1980s and 90s and rejected by those who strenuously maintained that religion in the academy is the object of study and cannot be in any way its method.

### Patricia Dold, Memorial University

#### **Paper Title: Pilgrimage and Protest**

In October 2023, I participated in a 100-kilometre pilgrimage to the Vatican as part of a small group of people involved in efforts to end abuse by clergy in the Roman Catholic Church. Though our path on the Via Francigena Roma had been used for various purposes over the centuries, its religious character was clear and even we carried a large wooden cross. However, it carried the phrase “zero tolerance,” a slogan of our campaign. So, we were all aware that this was a pilgrimage of protest. My expectation was that the pilgrimage would immerse us in the harmony of *communitas* as we all walked to our common goal. Yet, by the end of our pilgrimage, the unity of the group seemed to shatter and our campaign disrupted. This paper explores the nature of *communitas*, ritual creativity, and ritual rebellion as pilgrimage meets protest.

### Ryan Jones, Saint Mary's University

#### **Paper Title: Truth, Justice, and A Better Tomorrow – How Superman Embodies a Theology of Sound**

In a world characterized by apathy and visual detachment, Superman’s refusal to “turn off” his super-hearing models a profound commitment to the “community of sound.” This paper addresses the public engagement and dissemination of scholarship by using Superman to make the concept of sound as divinity more accessible. Moving beyond his origins as an American icon, I analyze Superman through Stephen H. Webb’s “Theo-Acoustics” to explore the morality of listening. By examining the “Luthor experiment” in *All-Star Superman* and the auditory “faithful witness” in James Gunn’s *Superman* (2025), I illustrate how sound creates an inescapable ethical awareness. This work is a cross-cultural perspective on contemporary religious life, demonstrating how fiction can help the public explore and redefine concepts of altruism and communal desire. This paper argues that superheroes provide a space for public scholarship, teaching the “lifelong discipline of listening” to a society struggling to hear one another.

Seyed Hossein Hosseini Nassab, Emory University

**Paper Title: Debt, Housing, and Belonging: Islamic Finance in North America's Contested Regulatory Spaces**

This paper examines how Islamic finance institutions in Canada and the US navigate debt within regulatory frameworks that often render Islamic financial products more costly than conventional ones, a condition Islamic finance practitioners describe as the “Cost of Being Muslim” (CBM). Focusing on Islamic housing mortgage companies, it frames debt as both a shared economic necessity in North America (central to housing access, credit-building, and entrepreneurship) and an ethical domain shaped by Qur’anic prohibitions on usury/interest. Attending to North American legal, political, and regulatory contexts, the study explores how Islamic financial ethics operate as a minority ethics within secular governance and multicultural citizenship regimes. It highlights how Muslim financial actors negotiate inclusion and exclusion while collaborating with Indigenous, Jewish, Christian, and non-religious communities around shared commitments to justice and responsibility. The paper shows how Islamic financial ethics reshape common economic spaces in contemporary Canada and beyond.

Todd Klaiman, University of Victoria (Centre for Studies in Religion and Society)

**Paper Title: Governing the Sacred: Space, Authority, and Belonging in Modern Chinese Buddhism**

Religious institutions are forged in spaces that are never neutral. For more than a century, Chinese Buddhist monastics have navigated volatile political landscapes—from republican experimentation to military authoritarianism and democratic reform—each redefining what religious space, authority, and belonging could mean. This paper traces how Buddhist monastics, state officials, and the broader public contested and redefined institutional control across three pivotal moments: the early Chinese Republic before the Anti-Japanese War, authoritarian Taiwan in the 1960s, and the Nationalist Party’s democratic consolidation on Taiwan in the early 2000s. Centering on struggles over organizational ownership and governance, it shows how shared religious spaces became sites of political confrontation, negotiation, and accommodation. Drawing on local newspapers, government archives, and monastic diaries, the paper broadens the evidentiary base of existing scholarship and illuminates the resilience, adaptability, and contested forms of belonging that have shaped modern religious life in Asia and beyond.

Usmon Boron, Yale University

**Paper Title: Secularism and Islamophobia: A View from Central Asia**

Scholars have recently begun unraveling connections between Islamophobia and secularism. My paper advances this line of inquiry by examining the conceptual legacy of Soviet secularization in predominantly Muslim Central Asia. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, it focuses on how non-observant Muslims—those estranged from the pietistic aspects of Islam through Soviet secularization—navigate the ongoing expansion of Islamic piety movements in their country. While most people I worked with held firmly to their identity as Muslims, many espoused apprehensive and even antagonistic attitudes toward normative forms of Islamic piety. My paper reveals that these attitudes are shaped by particular conceptions of the self and belief in God that Soviet secularization campaigns inadvertently popularized. My central argument is

that these conceptions of the self and belief are not peculiar to Soviet secularization but also underpin liberal secularities. My analysis advances our understanding of both secularism and Islamophobia as global phenomena.

### Yongshan He, The University of Winnipeg

#### **Paper Title: Embodied Inquiry: Bridging Student Practice with East Asian Religious Traditions**

One central pedagogical challenge in teaching East Asian religions lies in bridging the gap between text and life by anchoring abstract concepts in students' own experience. This paper discusses the pedagogical value of an embodied term project within an undergraduate course on "Mind and Body in East Asian Traditions." This assignment requires students to commit to a self-selected daily embodied practice over the term. By maintaining a daily journal documenting their physiological and mental states, students generate "personal data" which serves as the primary source for their final research paper. This presentation discusses how such an experiential assignment allows students to approach important East Asian concepts, such as xin (heart-mind) and qi (vital energy), against their lived reality. By placing their bodily practice in dialogue with course content, students discover how their own experiences resonate with or contradict insights from East Asian religious traditions.

### Zéa Jones, Saint Mary's University

#### **Paper Title: Blasphemous, Obscene Trash: Art Vandalism and Contemporary Religious Art**

Contemporary art remains divisive; contemporary religious art, even more so. Works of art depicting religious figures are consistently brought under fire when displayed in public museums or gallery exhibitions, particularly when the artwork is considered blasphemous, sacrilegious, or otherwise profane. This paper examines religious art vandalism, such as the 2024 attack on Andrea Saltini's controversial painting INRI, seeing how the assumed-secular space of the museum impacts our reception and interpretation of the work on display. To this end, it considers how space mediates religious artwork, seeking to understand the tension between secular space and sacred imagery and how ideas of blasphemy can be affected by the context in which it is experienced.

## ROUNDTABLES

### Charting the History of Muslims in Canada

**Moderator:** Aaron Hughes, Rochester University

**Discussants:**

Aaron Hughes, Rochester University

Jennifer Selby, Memorial University

Alyshea Cummins, Carleton University

Matt Sheedy, University of Manitoba

This roundtable brings together contributors to a proposed volume, by Aaron Hughes and Jennifer Selby, devoted to the history of Muslims and Muslim communities in Canada. Since much of the focus of Muslims in Canada has been on the contemporary period, this volume seeks to

break new ground by looking at the past. The panel will focus on both the difficulties and possibilities of working on this topic. Issues to be discussed include what resources we have at our disposal (e.g., archival, family photos, other material objects), methods of presentation, importance of differences and the need to account for regional variation.

### Coursework in a Dangerous Time

**Moderator:** Kenneth MacKendrick, University of Manitoba

**Discussants:**

Kenneth MacKendrick, University of Manitoba  
Ainsley Brennan, University of Manitoba  
Catherine van Reenan, University of Manitoba  
Kathy Block, University of Manitoba  
Nicole Goulet, University of Manitoba

The Department of Religion (University of Manitoba) has been collaborating with the Academic Learning Centre (University of Manitoba) for the better part of 20 years. Our collaborations have focused on support for students in the writing process. Collaborations include tutor-facilitated discussion groups, one-to-one tutoring for students on specific assignments, and tutor-led writing workshops. Based on their work with students, ALC staff have also provided feedback on assignment guidelines. This roundtable discussion will focus on "big picture" ideas coming out of these collaborations. The conversation will focus on what we have learned over the years and offer insights into how to create, design, and teach a class that engages students by focusing on the writing process. Roundtable participants include a Professor (and former Head of Dept), a former Writing Tutor Coordinator, an Instructor in the Department of Religion, and two writing tutors from the Department of Religion (undergraduate and graduate).

### Emerging Sikh Solidarities in Early Twenty-first Century Canada: Part 2

**Moderator:** Amardeep Kaur, University of Toronto

**Discussants:**

Zabeen Khamisa, University of Winnipeg  
Amardeep Kaur, University of Toronto  
Sharanpal Ruprai  
Rupeeh Kahlon

This roundtable builds on our session last year, bringing together three scholars who recently discovered overlap in their research. Our collective work examines new Sikh solidarities as they take shape across shared and contested spaces, including academic institutions, digital networks, grassroots activism, embodied practices, and public discourse in Canada and beyond. A central question guiding our discussion concerns the praxis of progressive solidarity: how do these new connections transform both common spaces of Sikh life and contested arenas where Sikh identities and values are debated? We engage critically with questions of possibility and limitation, asking how emerging spaces of religious belonging and knowledge production intersect with political tension, exclusion, and negotiation. We consider how Sikh solidarities are

formed, sustained, and challenged within shifting cultural and institutional landscapes, contributing to broader conversations about religion in public life, the politics of space, and the evolving study of religion in Canada.

### Identity and Religion: Relations and Place (IRRP)

**Moderator:** Paul Gareau, University of Alberta

**Discussants:**

Paul Gareau, University of Alberta  
Joseph Wiebe, University of Alberta  
Rubina Ramji, Cape Breton University  
Carlos Colorado, University of Winnipeg  
Alyshea Cummins, Carleton University  
Aaron Hughes, Rochester University

Within the “Common Places, Contested Spaces” of Canada, a methodological fixation on isolated, racialized religious identity continues to obscure the vital significance of relationality and situated knowledges of place. This roundtable addresses an ongoing challenge: how can the study of religion discuss identity in ways responsive to colonialism, structural racism, and capitalism through relational/kinship critical thinking?

This discussion explores relationality (i.e., Indigenous studies theory) as a shared analytical framework. Bringing together scholars of religion from across Canada, we ask: How can academics practice “good relations” with communities and institutions, knowledges and the land to challenge possessive logics and extractive research? This session supports the anti-colonial work of BIPOC and kinship-oriented scholars by making space/place for critical, relational academic practices that move beyond racialized and reified identity. We want to promote approaches rooted in kinship, positionality, mutual responsibility, and collective well-being of different distinct and related peoples/communities in Canada and beyond.

### Indigenous Spiritual Biography as the Matrix for Truth and Reconciliation

**Moderator:** Mark Ruml, University of Winnipeg

**Discussants:**

Mark Ruml, University of Winnipeg  
Shane Patterson, University of Winnipeg  
Jason Bone, University of Winnipeg  
Charlene Moore, University of Winnipeg  
Farrah Murdock, University of Winnipeg

This roundtable presents results from a SSHRC Insight Grant and offers an opportunity for the principal investigator and former graduate students/research assistants to showcase their work on the project. Mark F. Ruml (Scottish, English, Irish, Czech) will introduce the project and share insights from the Knowledge Carriers regarding what is needed for reconciliation. Jason Bone (Anishinaabe) will present his work as co-editor of the book Wally Swain: The Life and Teachings

of a Midewiwin Inini. Shane Patterson (Dakota), a Traditional Healer who worked as a research assistant and practicum student in the Masters in Development Practice: Indigenous Focus program at the University of Winnipeg, will share his work on the project and on Traditional Healing Practices. Filmmakers Charlene Moore (Cree) and Farrah Murdock (Anishinaabe/Cree) will present their work on the film produced for this project, including a short 10-minute clip.

## The State of Religion Programs in Canada

**Moderator:** Rubina Ramji, Cape Breton University

**Discussants:**

Alison Marshall, Brandon University  
Pamela Klassen, University of Toronto  
Mikaël Bauer, McGill University  
Scott Kline, University of Waterloo  
Tinu Ruparell, University of Calgary  
Rachel Yakimishen, Brandon University

In recent years, some Canadian religion departments and programs have been forced to amalgamate, while a small number have disappeared altogether. There are fears that more religion programs are under threat. This roundtable offers a chance for faculty, students and others to gather and discuss the state of religion programs in Canada and the political, ideological, financial and sometimes anti-EDID motivated threats to them. Indeed, religion program faculty are very involved in EDID initiatives to decolonize the academy and in smaller universities religion faculty may be the only ones who specialize in and offer courses on non-Western religions and cultures. Presenters will focus their comments on the current moment including enrolments, trends, budget challenges, administration and faculty tactics and strategies, along with other challenges and opportunities.

## Translating Psychedelic Experiences: Making Meaning Across Religious, Clinical, and Communal Contexts

**Moderator:** Reid Barber, University of Ottawa

**Discussants:**

Bridget Thompson, University of Ottawa  
Keren Gottfried, University of Ottawa  
Nathan Springer, University of Ottawa  
Reid Barber, University of Ottawa  
Victor Distefano Wiltenburg, University of Ottawa  
Wallace Murray, University of Ottawa

Psychedelic use is increasingly visible in Canada, with 17% of Canadians reporting lifetime use. Whether through psilocybin-assisted therapy,entheogenic churches, neoshamanic ayahuasca groups, or religious communities contending with congregants' psychedelic experiences, they are reshaping how religion (and nonreligion) is lived in Canada. As these experiences gain cultural legitimacy, individuals and institutions face a shared challenge: how to translate disruptive, often

spiritual encounters within existing epistemological and ontological categories, while those encounters challenge the categories themselves.

This roundtable brings together graduate students from the University of Ottawa's Psychedelic Studies programs to explore how translation occurs across diverse settings—religious traditions, clinical research environments, psychonaut communities, neoshamanic networks, and retreat centres.

Analysis will explore the role of meaning-making, how metaphysical claims are negotiated, and what counts as legitimate knowledge. Insights will spark an open discussion on how psychedelics influence concepts of healing, spirituality, and authority within contemporary Canadian communities.