PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(Interdisciplinary Studies)

Michelle Beauchamp
2007  University of Victoria, MA (Environmental Studies)
2005  University of Winnipeg, BA (Hons)

“Sacred Places, Stories Places: Ancient Wisdom for a Modern World”

Thursday December 12, 2013
10.00 AM
Halpern Centre for Graduate Students, Room 108

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Duncan Taylor, Environmental Studies, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. James Lawson, Political Science, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Thomas Heyd, Environmental Studies, UVic (Member)
Dr. Alan Drengson, Environmental Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Rev. Dr. Paula Sampson, Vancouver School of Theology, UBC

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Onowa McIvor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic
Abstract
This dissertation begins with the hypothesis that sacred places and their stories are connected in complex ways. This refers to place-based sacred places; that is, places which gain their sacred qualities from their natural environment. The two main examples used are both located in the U.K.: Puzzlewood and the Forest of Dean, and Stonehenge. It is further theorized that the stories within these places are repositories of an ancient wisdom; a memory of what it means to live with a sense of the divine in nature. Paying attention to those stories, and to the presences found in these places, may engender a greater appreciation of the interconnectedness of the human world to the natural world and to the sacred in nature, and of each person to another. Thus an ethic of care for that storied place may develop, and from this, a more harmonious relationship between people and the larger environment may come about. Such an ethic of care may be central in finding solutions to current environmental problems, and preventing future ones. Thus a new story about our relationship with the Earth, based on ancient wisdom, may become the conduit for a kinder, gentler future, where peace, social justice, and environmental care form both cultural paradigms and individual worldviews. This fusion of stories, the sacred, and the sacred in nature as a way towards self-realization, the development of an ethic of care, and the vision a more harmonious future, is the unique contribution of this dissertation.

Other elements of this dissertation include a background of the ways in which history is presented, how this contributes to the paradigms and worldviews found in the modern Western world, and how those paradigms affect thinking about sacredness in nature, as well as a discussion of why stories are central to all of our lives, and how places come to be imbued with stories. All of this is then set within a framework of the principles of the deep ecology movement. To bring all this together with a cohesive collection of methods, the concentric circles model was created and is explained.

Additionally, this dissertation presents five criteria that could prove useful in assessing sacredness in place when such sacred sites are contested, as happens quite often. This too may help to protect (care for) these places.
Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships
2008-2011 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Canada Graduate Scholarship (3 year Doctoral)
2005 – SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship (Masters)
2005 – President's Research Award, University of Victoria
2001-2005 – Student of Highest Distinction, University of Winnipeg
2005 – Gold Medal for Highest Standing in an Honours Program (Geography), University of Winnipeg

Presentations
Church, M. “Finding the Sacred in Place: Four criteria for establishing sacredness of place.” Cascadia Critical Geographies Conference, University of Victoria, October 29-30, 2010 (oral).

Publications


