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**IN  
DIEM**

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## THE 2026 EUARE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Since its founding in 2016, the European Academy of Religion (EuARE) has emerged as a leading forum for the study of religions in Europe. Founded in Bologna at the initiative of Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose (FSCIRE), the conference has steadily built a wide and dynamic network of scholars and institutions, offering a platform for exchange among a broad range of academic institutions, journals, publishers, media, and scholars across Europe and beyond. EuARE contributes to shaping a shared European and international space for academic exchange in religious studies. Subsequent editions, along with consistently growing participation, have confirmed EuARE's role as a key reference point for the international scholarly community.

*The 2026 conference will take place in Rome, from 30 June to 3 July, hosted by LUISS University.*

Building on previous editions, EuARE will once again provide an interdisciplinary forum dedicated to the study of religions in all their dimensions. This year's theme, *Religion and (In)equalities*, addresses an issue of pressing relevance for contemporary societies. Social, legal, and gender inequalities remain central challenges in contemporary societies, and religions have played an ambivalent role in both sustaining and addressing them. This theme invites reflection on how religious traditions, institutions, and actors shape, reinforce, or challenge different forms of inequality.

**Francesca Badini**

*EuARE is not simply a venue for exchange, but a space where scholarly agendas are actively shaped.*

The range of disciplinary perspectives, from theology and history to law and social sciences, enables a nuanced engagement with the changing forms of religions in contemporary societies. The conference structure, organized around thematic "Open and Closed Panels" and "Author Meets Critics" sessions, encourages dialogue across fields and supports the development of ongoing research, opening up new directions of inquiry.

*Within this framework, FSCIRE plays an active role in the development of the conference.*

Beyond its founding initiative and a continuing support to the activities of its secretariat, FSCIRE contributes to its intellectual profile through its research groups (*cantieri*), which, from a historical-critical perspective, help shape both the themes and the approaches represented at EuARE. The panels presented in 2026 reflect this engagement: they emerge from research projects developed over time in FSCIRE and situated within a broader research agenda.

The panels organized by FSCIRE span a wide range of topics, including the historical interactions between Christianity and Islam in the early modern period; the study of violence in places of worship

through digital tools and global datasets; contemporary ecumenical dynamics; and the analysis of religious and identity-based conflicts in Europe. They also address key issues such as semantic shifts and translation in the relation between witnessing and martyrdom; processes of norm formation after Vatican II; ongoing developments in Septuagint studies (particularly in relation to the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint*, HTLS); and emerging tools, datasets, and AI-driven approaches for the study of religion. This diversity reflects a research approach that integrates historical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives, making a substantive contribution to long-standing and more recent international debates in religious studies.

The panels that FSCIRE is hosting and co-organizing function not only as sites for presenting research, but also as spaces for its further development, strengthening the link between project-based work and scholarly exchange. EuARE 2026 thus offers an important opportunity to consolidate a network of collaborations that FSCIRE has built over time. More broadly, it highlights the ongoing interaction between institutional initiatives and scholarly research that has shaped the EuARE project since 2016 and continues to support its development within the European and international academic landscape.

This issue of In Diem offers an overview of the panels proposed by members of the Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose, presenting the papers that will be discussed within each session.

## Encounters with the “Other” Monotheism: Christian Missionaries and Islamic Communities in the Early Modern World

**PROPOSER:** Valentina Bottanelli (FSCIRE)  
**CHAIR:** Francesca Badini (FSCIRE)

While the history of Christian missions during the early modern expansion of empires has extensively documented encounters with indigenous, polytheistic, or non-Abrahamic traditions, the specific interactions with established Islamic communities remain an area ripe for deeper investigation. This panel explores how Catholic missionaries and Protestant pastors described, engaged with, and attempted to evangelize Muslim populations from the Middle East to the Far East. By moving beyond a Eurocentric Crusade narrative, this session examines the practical methods of encounter, ranging from theological polemics to the pragmatic challenges of daily coexistence. A central focus of the panel will be the “translation” of faith – both linguistic and cultural. How did missionaries adapt Arabic and local Islamic lexicons to communicate Christian catechisms? To what extent did the presence of a pre-existing Abrahamic framework force a change in missionary strategy compared to encounters with non-monotheistic societies? The panel invites scholars to examine three primary areas of missionary production: (1) Translation and lexicography: how missionaries adapted Arabic and local lexicons (such as Malay) to explain Christian mysteries, often wrestling with pre-existing Islamic terminology for God, prophecy, and salvation. (2) Exegesis of the “other”: Christian explanations and “refutations” of Muslim texts, where the Qur’an was studied as both a hurdle and a tool for conversion. (3) Methodological manuals: the study of missionary handbooks or specific extracts explicitly devoted to the *methodus* of interacting with and converting Muslim communities.

### TRANSLATING TAWHĪD: CONCEPTIONS OF DIVINE UNITY IN EARLY MODERN CATHOLIC MISSIONARY LITERATURE FROM THE LEVANT

**SPEAKER:** F. Stella (Pontifical Gregorian University)

During the early modern period, European knowledge of Islam expanded markedly through the field-based activities of Christian missionaries operating in regions of the Islamic world. Recent scholarship has shown how some of these missionaries transformed the experiential knowledge acquired over extended periods of mission into substantial textual productions that circulated widely in multiple European languages. In these works, enduring patterns of religious polemic coexisted with extensive ethnographic and doctrinal material on Muslim beliefs and practices, reflecting the complex entanglement of confessional agendas and early modern knowledge production. This paper examines the conceptual translation of the doctrine of tawhīd in the writings of 17th-century Catholic missionaries active in Arabic-speaking regions of the Levant, whose works were shaped by first-hand knowledge of Islamic rituals and devotional practices, notably the Jesuit Michel Nau and the Capuchin Michel Febvre. Fluent in Arabic and other Oriental languages, both authors produced wide-ranging works on Islam addressed to

a European readership, as well as more concise handbooks designed as missionary tools of religious controversy. By comparing these different textual genres, the paper analyzes how the doctrine of tawhīd was reframed in relation to the specific aims of missionary writing and the distinct audiences to which these texts were addressed.

### HEURNIUS, ADMONITION AND RUYLL’S ALLAH: THEORY VERSUS PRACTICE IN DUTCH VOC MISSIONS TO MUSLIM ASIA

**SPEAKER:** V. Bottanelli (FSCIRE)

This paper examines the strategies of Dutch VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) pastors in engaging with the established Islamic communities of the East Asian spice islands during the 17th century. It explores a twofold dynamic by distinguishing between missionary theory and practice. First, it analyzes the prescriptive theory underpinning such encounters through a close reading of Justus Heurnius’ manual *De legatione evangelica ad Indos capesenda admonitio* (1618/1628), a pioneering Calvinist treatise on mission, composed before Heurnius’ own mission in Batavia. Second, the paper contrasts this theory with on-the-ground practice, investigating the actual linguistic and social adaptations made by pastors in the Indies. It analyzes, for instance, the pragmatic adoption of the Arabic lexicon, such as the use of the term “Allah” for God in the works of contemporaries like Ruyll.

### SPIRITUAL RAID FROM SICILY TO THE CYCLADES: JESUIT MISSIONS IN THE “MEDITERRANEAN INDIES” DURING THE 17TH CENTURY

**SPEAKER:** F. D’Avenia (University of Palermo)

During the 17th century, the Jesuits of the Sicilian Province deployed intense missionary action in the Sicilian countryside, which covered more than a hundred localities, including the Greek rite colonies established in the 15th century as a consequence of the Arbëreshë diaspora from Albania, as well as the islands of Malta and Pantelleria, where the Arabic language and Islamic religious tradition were still widespread (in Malta also due to the presence of Muslim slaves). However, the Jesuits’ “popular”, “internal” or “flying missions” went as far as the Cyclades, the so-called archipelagus turbatus in the Aegean Sea, where *communicatio in sacris* (sharing of rites and preaching) between Orthodox and Latin clergy and laity was inevitable, and increased during Jesuit missions. Indeed, between 1612 and 1644 the Cyclades saw some twenty “spiritual raids” (*scorerie spirituali*) from Chios, where a stable residence of the Society was established in 1595, also subject to the Sicilian Province. All these islands, including Sicily itself, were part of a common space that could be defined as the “Mediterranean Indies”, where religious and cultural métissage, negotiation and conflict constantly overlapped, being part of everyday life and sometimes even sharing the very same missionaries. ●



Moors of Andalusia playing chess, from Alfonso X’s *Book of Games* [Public Domain]

## Catholic Women and Gender Dynamics in Early 20th Century China: Agency, Service, and Representation

**PROPOSER:** Valeria Papis (Facoltà di Teologia di Lugano, Università della Svizzera Italiana)  
**CHAIR:** Valentina Bottanelli (FSCIRE); Raissa de Gruttola (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice); Federica Cicci (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna)

The panel explores the role of Catholic women in changing ideas and practices of womanhood in China from the late Qing dynasty to the mid-20th century. At the turn of the century, Chinese women’s lives were largely shaped by patriarchal family structures, Confucian norms, and social and legal inequalities, with marriage and domesticity as central expectations. At the same time war, political upheaval, and reform movements intensified debates on women’s education, morality, and social participation. Catholic missionaries, as members of female religious congregations, operated within male-dominated church hierarchies, yet differed sharply from most Chinese women in being unmarried, institutionally supported, professionally trained, and mobile. Through schools, hospitals, orphanages, and charitable work, they exercised forms of authority and autonomy that challenged prevailing gender norms, while remaining embedded in unequal religious and transnational power relations. The panel examines Catholic institutions as spaces where alternative models of womanhood were constructed and negotiated. These institutions both reproduced social and gender hierarchies and offered limited but significant opportunities for agency, including access to education, skills, public service, and life paths beyond marriage. Using perspectives from gender history and the study of religious feminization, the panel treats women’s agency as relational and situational, shaped by everyday negotiations between missionary women and local Catholic women. Comparative and connected approaches are welcome, including studies of Protestant missions, Buddhist nuns, indigenous religious initiatives, or transnational networks, contributing to broader debates on religion, gender, and inequality in modern China and East Asia.

## THE FEMINIZATION OF CATHOLIC MISSIONARY EDUCATION: THE COMMITMENT OF THE INGENBOHL SISTERS IN THE 1930S AND 1940S MANCHURIA

**SPEAKER:** F. Cicci (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna)

The paper delves into the contributions of the Ingenbohl Sisters, a Swiss Catholic congregation, to the advancement of female education and the transformation of women’s roles in Manchuria during the 1930s and 1940s. How did they contribute to the feminization of Catholic education? What impact did their efforts have on the status of women, cultural exchange, and identity formation within the dynamic socio-political context of the region? Focusing on the role of local women as educated catechists and the different types of mission schools, the paper analyzes how professional efforts made by the Ingenbohl Sisters in the education field contributed to modeling new ideas of women’s roles within Chinese society. By employing a multidimensional approach encompassing archival research, media analysis, and visual representations, this study explores the transnational Catholic sisters’ enduring legacy and its impact on the status of local women in the broader context of societal transformation during the first decades of 20th-century Manchuria.

## THE EDUCATION OF CHINESE GIRLS IN CATHOLIC MISSIONS: THE CASE STUDY OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE’S JINGYI GIRLS SCHOOL IN KAIFENG

**SPEAKER:** V.S. Papis (Facoltà di Teologia di Lugano, Università della Svizzera italiana)

In the context of Catholic mission schools in China, the Jingyi school represents an interesting case study. It was founded in 1932, and until its confiscation in 1951, it remained the only middle and high school for girls in Kaifeng, a provincial capital of 300,000 inhabitants, distant from the main industrial centers of China, with a very low foreign presence, but deeply affected by the intense warfare of the 1930s and 1940s. For 20 years, the American congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence educated Chinese girls and adolescents from different social strata, contributing not only to their spiritual growth but also to their emancipation in a time of major cultural and political changes, subtly challenging the many inequalities of traditional Chinese society. During the so-called Liberation, the communists addressed the school as “a stronghold of feudalism”, but actually the way of life of many students and educators, as reported in missionary accounts, testifies a firm rejection of the stereotypical feminine passivity, crystallized by the long Confucian tradition. In many cases, these young women decided not to marry, to support themselves, and live up to their ideals and moral standards to the point of facing political persecution and social harassment. By reconstructing the history of the Jingyi and highlighting the lives of some of its teachers and students, this presentation wants to offer an insight into the Chinese Catholic women of Kaifeng lives and their struggle against the inequalities of their times.

## NEGOTIATING MODERNITY: CATHOLIC ACTION AND THE REIMAGINING OF WOMANHOOD IN THE CATHOLIC WOMEN'S QUARTERLY (1934)

**SPEAKER: V. Bottanelli (FSCIRE)**

This paper examines the first two issues of the *Catholic Women's Quarterly* (《天主教婦女季刊》), published in 1934, to map how the Chinese Catholic laity navigated the shifting gender dynamics of the Republican era. Structured to integrate global ecclesiastical news with local social debates, this journal acted as a discursive space where the Catholic Action movement sought to professionalize and mobilize women within the church hierarchy. By focusing in particular on two articles from different sections of the journal, a defense of the Women's Movement (《婦女運動: 公教提高女子之地位》) and a critique of birth control (《節育問題》), this paper will explore the tension between Catholic tradition and early 20th-century feminism, and the elements in dialogue and contrast with 1930s Chinese patriotic discourse.

## FRANCISCAN SISTERS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE EVANGELIZATION OF EARLY 20TH-CENTURY CHINA

**SPEAKER: R. de Gruttola (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)**

This paper examines the pivotal yet often marginalized role of Franciscan women in the evangelization and social infrastructure of China from the late 19th century through the first decades of the 20th century. While traditional missiology has frequently centered on the leadership of male clergy, this study argues that Franciscan sisters were fundamental actors in the changes that Catholic missionary activities underwent in the late Qing period, at the volatile crossroads of imperial transition and rising nationalism. These women navigated complex gender dynamics within church hierarchies, Chinese society, and Catholic communities in China. Research has shown that out of 29 Franciscan groups that reached or were directly established in China, only four were of male missionaries, underlining the importance of the female presence in this context. The purpose of the paper is to give an outline of the main features of the role the Franciscan women played in early 20th-century China, examining the activities of a wide variety of groups, from the more famous ones, such as the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, to the less-known local groups, such as the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows. By analyzing archival correspondence and missionary periodicals, this research demonstrates that Franciscan women were not merely auxiliaries to male missionaries, but they asserted a silent but powerful agency that deeply influenced the landscape of Chinese Catholicism during a period of profound cultural upheaval. ●

P A N E L 0 3

## Ecumenical *Filocalia* for the Twenty-First Century: What to Save When the World Ends

**PROPOSER: Luca Ferracci (FSCIRE)**  
**CHAIR: Luca Ferracci (FSCIRE)**

This open panel invites papers on a concrete, ecumenically charged question: which works – texts, corpora, and “schools” of Christian thought and practice – should be preserved and transmitted to future generations of ecumenists, and by what criteria? The title invokes an end-of-the-world horizon in order to make a present difficulty harder to evade: the transmission of ecumenical theological knowledge is under strain, and the places and habits that once sustained it can no longer be taken for granted. Under threats of destruction, churches often struggle to speak and act together. Part of the difficulty is institutional. Academic theology faces shrinking infrastructures, changing student publics, contested authority, and fragmented formation. At the same time, theology is increasingly displaced into a widened ecosystem – private educational institutes, think tanks, ecclesial initiatives, media platforms, and influencer-driven publics – often with different incentives and measures of credibility. In this setting, ecumenism is especially vulnerable: in many contexts, the generation now assuming leadership is less instinctively committed to ecumenism, less trained to read across confessions, and less formed by the “slow” virtues of dialogue. This panel asks what it would mean to assemble an ecumenical *Filocalia* for the 21st century: not a nostalgic canon, and not a default “Western classics” syllabus, but a deliberately ecumenical selection – Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal, and charismatic – with a global horizon beyond Europe and North America. We welcome proposals on cross-confessional classics with real reception; key texts and debates in modern ecumenical theology; authors and corpora from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and diasporas; documentary, historiographical, and biographical works shaping ecumenical memory; and monastic and ascetical literature (ancient and modern) as part of the ecumenical archive.

## THE AGE TO COME AS CALL AND JUDGMENT: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL OUTLOOK OF METR. JOHN ZIZIOULAS AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF ECUMENISM

**SPEAKER: N. Asproulis (Volos Academy for Theological Studies)**

Metr. John Zizioulas' eschatological outlook represents one of his most significant contributions to ecumenical theology. He suggests that eschatology should not be viewed merely as one of many chapters in church theology; instead, it should be regarded as a foundational approach that influences all aspects of the church's theology and life. It centers on a person – the resurrected Christ, referred to as the *Eschatos* – rather than merely a theoretical discussion about the end of time. Moreover, eschatology must not be treated as an excuse or justification for personal or ecclesiastical shortcomings. Rather, it serves as a continuous call for openness to the ever-renewing presence of the Spirit and functions as a form of judgment. This judgment will ultimately determine, at the conclusion of history and in God's coming kingdom, what holds meaning and value – both in terms of history and tradition, as well as in doctrine and our individual and communal lives.

## CHRISTOS YANNARAS: THE LIMITS OF AN ETHNOCENTRIC RECEPTION OF THE WEST

**SPEAKER: D. Keramidis (Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas – Angelicum)**

Greek theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras (1935–2024) is renowned for his contributions to renewing Greek Orthodox theology and for using an innovative language that engaged a wide audience. Yannaras is among the most influential contemporary Orthodox scholars. Equally important is his concept of the “West”, especially his critical engagement with the Western religious paradigm. This aspect has a central role in Yannaras' thought and work. Understanding this critique offers valuable insights into a restrictive interpretation of Orthodox tradition, which aligns with the idea of ecumenism. This is because inter-Christian dialogue helps to re-evaluate the boundaries between different ecclesiastical traditions, encouraging a creative hermeneutics and moving away from exclusivist readings of one's own faith.

## PREPARING FOR THE END OF THE WORLD: FRENCH ECUMENICAL DISCOURSE IN THE 1930S

**SPEAKER: S. Brown (Swiss Institute of Systematics and Ethics – University of Geneva)**

Alongside the institutional and ecclesiological challenges facing ecumenical memory in the 21st century is the role of the English-language in academic discourse internationally. As a result, English-language histories of the ecumenical movement tend to become dominant narratives. While such histories tend to focus on the institutional construction of ecumenism, this paper seeks to reconstruct for future generations of historians the ecumenical and intellectual ferment in the Francophone Europe of the 1930s, something largely overlooked by English-language historiography.

Taking place largely outside established institutions, these ecumenical contacts and dialogues were nourished by young Catholic theologians such as Yves Congar and Jean Daniélou; French intellectuals like Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel; Orthodox including Nicolai Berdayev and Sergei Bulgakov; and Protestants that included Pierre Maury, Suzanne de Dietrich, André Philip, and Willem Visser 't Hooft.

While these encounters provided a seedbed for ecumenical developments after World War II, particularly the opening of the Roman Catholic Church to ecumenism, they took against the background of the increasingly threatening international developments of the 1930s. The last major gathering in 1939, immediately before World War II, focused on ecumenical responses to war and peace, church and state, and the challenge of contemporary ideologies, questions that now resonate in the 21st century.

## HISTORIES AND HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

**SPEAKER: L. Ferracci (FSCIRE)**

This paper surveys the major seasons of ecumenical historiography: early narrative and institutional accounts, biography-driven interpretations, and later critical/global reconfigurations. On this basis, it proposes which key “histories” of the ecumenical movement should be “saved” for future ecumenists: works that have most shaped the movement's self-understanding and that remain essential for transmitting its memory, debates, and horizons of unity.

## TOWARD AN ECUMENICAL *FILOCALIA* FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE: REIMAGINING CHRISTIAN INTERIORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND CONFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

**SPEAKER: P.R. Surowiec (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)**

The paper proposes the concept of an ecumenical *Filocalia* for the Anthropocene as a heuristic framework for rearticulating Christian spiritual resources in late modern contexts marked by fragmentation, ecological crisis, and weakened institutional authority. Rather than reconstructing the *Filocalia* as a devotional anthology, the paper interprets it as a curated repertoire of spiritual grammars capable of shaping interiority and relational personhood beyond confessional boundaries. The proposed core of the ecumenical *Filocalia* draws on a historical-theological constellation of formative voices: Augustine's theology of interiority (*interior intimo meo*), Aquinas' integration of grace and reason, John Henry Newman's account of the reception of truth in conscience (*cor ad cor loquitur, real assent*), John Zizioulas' relational ontology of personhood, and Christos Yannaras' existential understanding of truth as a mode of being (*tropos hyparxeos*). Together, these perspectives articulate convergent patterns of Christian interior formation that resist both individualistic spiritualization and moralistic reductionism. This core is complemented by post-Reformation and publicly communicable witnesses of embodied Christian responsibility (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Merton, Brother Roger of Taizé), indicating how interior formation may translate into forms of lived, relational, and socially credible spirituality. The constellation is not proposed as an authoritative canon, but as a *Filocalia* of late modern post-secular Christianity: a preliminary map of spiritual resources capable of sustaining Christian meaning-making and ethical responsibility in the Anthropocene. ●

Detail of the Byzantine fresco of the Last Judgment in the Church of Saint Saviour in Chora, Istanbul, 14th century [cc-by-sa-2.0]



## The Global Pontificate of Pius XII: Soft Diplomacy, Public Figures, and Archival Documents

**PROPOSER:** Valentina Bottanelli (FSCIRE); Chiara Solazzo (DREST); Mara Dissegna (DREST)  
**CHAIR:** Claire Maligot (FSCIRE)

The opening of the Vatican archives for the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958) has inaugurated a “global turn” in the study of the modern papacy. Moving beyond traditional debates surrounding World War II, this panel explores the Holy See’s deployment of “soft diplomacy” as a tool to navigate a rapidly fragmenting international landscape. It seeks to re-evaluate the Holy See’s agency as an international actor during the transition towards a bipolar world. This session aims to trace the papacy’s strategic responses to shifting global scenarios, ranging from the fragile equilibrium in East Asia and the onset of the Cold War in the USSR, to the complexities of the nascent State of Israel and political upheavals in South America. The panel invites submissions exploring: the intersection between newly released archival materials and public sources (speeches, journals, etc.); the Holy See’s engagement with peace conferences and international treaties; the long-term evolution and modernization of Vatican diplomacy; Pius XII’s personal agency and leadership in diplomatic strategy. Proposals focusing on the USSR, the Korean War, and India are particularly encouraged.

### FROM PASTORAL SOLIDARITY TO CANONICAL RUPTURE: THE RHETORICAL DIPLOMACY OF PIUS XII TOWARD THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (1952–1958)

**SPEAKER:** V. Bottanelli (FSCIRE)

This paper analyzes the Holy See’s diplomatic and doctrinal response to the People’s Republic of China through a sequential examination of three pivotal public pronouncements: the 1952 apostolic letter *Cupimus imprimis*, the 1954 encyclical *Ad Sinarum gentem*, and the 1958 encyclical *Ad Apostolorum principis*. *Cupimus imprimis* established the initial public narrative. Addressed to the Chinese faithful, this letter performed a significant diplomatic function by asserting the church’s cultural and spiritual compatibility with the Chinese people while reinforcing the necessity of ecclesiastical loyalty to the Roman pontiff. *Ad Sinarum gentem* marked a strategic shift in response to the nascent Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA). This encyclical transformed pastoral solidarity into a formal doctrinal manifesto, explicitly challenging the CCPA’s principles and the state’s ideological requirements. Finally, *Ad Apostolorum principis* represents a definitive diplomatic rupture. Responding to the unauthorized consecration of bishops, this document provided a comprehensive canonical censure, formally invalidating the state-sanctioned church structure. Collectively, these documents served as the primary instruments of Vatican statecraft in the absence of formal diplomatic channels. This paper posits that their progression, from pastoral appeal to doctrinal defense and, ultimately, to canonical censure, demonstrates Pius XII’s systematic use of the papal magisterium to engage in global geopolitical discourse. This strategy aimed to define ideological boundaries, challenge the international standing of the Beijing administration, and assert universal papal jurisdiction, exemplifying the utility of public doctrine as a core component of the Holy See’s soft-power diplomacy.

### RADIO MESSAGES, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AND POLITICAL DISTRUST: PIUS XII’S PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON RUSSIA

**SPEAKER:** C. Solazzo (DREST)

This paper analyzes the public speeches and radio messages of Pope Pius XII between 1950 and 1957 that refer to Russia and to Catholic communities living under communist regimes. Rather than offering a general condemnation of communism, these interventions articulate a coherent critique centered on two key themes: the denial of religious freedom and a profound distrust of the political system imposed by Soviet-style regimes. Through close textual analysis of selected radio messages, the paper shows how Pius XII consistently framed religious freedom as a fundamental and non-negotiable right, presenting its suppression not only as an attack on the church but as evidence of the moral illegitimacy of the communist political order. References to Russia and the Soviet sphere thus function as concrete examples of a system portrayed as inherently incompatible with human dignity, conscience, and the autonomy of religious life. At the same time, the paper highlights how Pius XII avoided purely theological language, adopting instead a vocabulary that resonates with broader debates on rights, law, and political authority in the early Cold War. This communicative strategy reveals a persistent skepticism toward the possibility of genuine coexistence between the church and communist regimes, while reinforcing the Vatican’s role as a moral authority intervening in international public discourse.

### THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE NEW INTERNATIONAL CHARTS UNDER A RELIGIOUS IDENTITY LECTURE (GENEVA 1949, GENEVA 1951, AND THE HAGUE 1954)

**SPEAKER:** M. Dissegna (DREST)

At the end of World War II, the international community sought to identify common legal instruments to prevent a repetition of what happened in that conflict. At the same time, these legal instruments had to take into account the changes in the international order occurring during the international meetings and had to relate to a still-developing new global order. The elaboration of such instruments did not begin with the end of World War II, of course, but, with it their implementation became pressing. In such a context, the important phases of elaboration of the international charts between 1945 and 1955 could be an interesting laboratory for understanding the compromises, new elements, lines of tension, and impossible encounter of identities that characterized the activities of the people who worked on the negotiations for these charts. The most important charts are interesting not only for the results but also for the steps that they took to see the light at the end of the process. How the different identities involved could (or could not) find a compromise for a better social and international inclusion? How do the identities of the individual actors find a place in such international meetings? What were the common meanings, the common (or not) ideological basis for such negotiations? What were the different steps made by such actors to define a common sense of tolerance, human rights, peace, freedom, and so on? And today, in a completely different context, could these values still be considered evergreen and valid? In this paper, three important conventions will be considered from the Vatican documentation: the 1949 Geneva Convention, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the 1954 The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property.

### “THE TURKISH POPE” IN THE SERVICE OF PIUS XII: SOFT DIPLOMACY, RELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE, AND THE NEGOTIATED SECULARISM OF WARTIME ISTANBUL (1939–1944)

**SPEAKER:** I. Acehan (Neveşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University)

This paper examines the diplomatic and pastoral tenure of Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (the future Pope John XXIII, known as “the Turkish pope”) as apostolic delegate to Turkey during the pontificate of Pius XII. Roncalli’s mission in Istanbul serves as a pioneering case study in “soft diplomacy” during a period defined by the radical transition from the Ottoman “millet” system to the secularism of the Turkish Republic (Laiklik). Drawing on Roncalli’s published diaries and diplomatic correspondence, this study analyzes how he reinvented the role of papal representative to navigate the demands of a modern secular state. Moving beyond the historical “protectorate” models of the Ottoman era, Roncalli utilized the Republic’s secular framework to foster a new “theology of presence”. This included his radical introduction of the Turkish language into Catholic liturgy and a strict adherence to secular dress codes, signaling a profound respect for national sovereignty. Furthermore, the paper explores how this negotiated secularism allowed Roncalli to foster a unique environment of religious coexistence. By positioning the apostolic delegation as a neutral humanitarian hub during World War II, he facilitated complex rescue operations for Jewish refugees in collaboration with both Turkish authorities and international agencies. This paper concludes that Roncalli’s ability to thrive within a secular environment provided the essential practical blueprint for the church’s modern embrace of religious pluralism at Vatican II.

### PACELLIAN BISHOPS? US BISHOPS TAKING PUBLIC STANCES ON INTERFAITH RELATIONS, 1943–1965

**SPEAKER:** C. Maligot (FSCIRE)

This paper challenges the historical consensus on the liberal stance of US bishops on post-war Jewish-Christian relations. By examining ecclesiological, political, and doctrinal factors shaping both individual bishops and their collective body, the NCWC, I reassess the doctrinal framework granted to interfaith relations within the broader concern over “religious indifferentism”, typical of Pius XII’s pontificate after 1948. As late as October 1962, the NCWC Administrative Board opposed reintroducing the “Jewish Decree” to the Council agenda. Did US bishops remain deeply Pacellian? To outline NCWC’s ambivalence, I serially analyze its decisions from the 1943 “Principles of Intercreedal Cooperation” to 1965, contextualizing them within the church hierarchy – toward Rome (papacy, Roman congregations, apostolic delegate) and toward the bishops. As a collective body, NCWC took conservative stances. Yet, pre-Vatican II limits on collegiality and focus to preserve episcopal authority within one’s jurisdiction enabled local adaptations and nationwide diversity. Rather than simply obeying Rome, the NCWC anticipated Roman concerns about the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) in 1947, over complied with Cicognani’s enquiry following the Holy Office warning in 1950, and issued its own reservations in the mid-1950s. Avoiding NCCJ as an interfaith public platform, NCWC preferred informal contacts with the Synagogue Council of America and the National Council of Churches. Public engagement remained cautious: gentlemen’s agreements prevailed, joint statements were avoided, and discourse on religious difference was tightly controlled by the Adm. Board according to the 1943 Principles. Meanwhile, the Dept. of Social Action, handling most interfaith interactions, grew increasingly at odds with such strict separation between doctrine and civic cooperation. Yet, the 1943 Principles had a dual effect, as they were still invoked in 1965 against the newly promulgated *Nostra aetate*.

### HALLOWING HOLLYWOOD: THE BURGEONING FILM DIPLOMACY OF POPE PIUS XII

**SPEAKER:** N. Dawes (University of Notre Dame)

This paper examines the origins of what may be termed the Holy See’s film diplomacy by way of the Hollywood film industry. After the restoration of Vatican sovereignty through the Lateran Treaty in 1929, the Holy See sought ways to expand its influence beyond its limited temporal dominion. In an effort to navigate the ideological battles waged in the era of totalitarianism, the Holy See became an early proponent of popular media. Led by Eugenio Pacelli, first as Cardinal Secretary of State under Pope Pius XI in 1930, and then on succeeding him as Pius XII in 1939, the Holy See became a pioneer in utilizing nascent media for diplomatic purposes. Pacelli helped Pius XI usher in Vatican Radio in 1931. Then, upon his own ascension to the papacy, he welcomed the Vatican’s first film documentary in 1939, became the first pope to star in a movie, for *Pastor Angelicus* in 1942, established the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in 1948 to guide Catholic involvement in the film industry, and a year later became the first pope to appear on television. As pope, film emerged as a particular point of interest for Pacelli, who would give eight speeches on it between 1941 and 1949, and a further two encyclicals in the 1950s. This paper traces Pacelli’s burgeoning interest in the film industry as Cardinal Secretary of State into his papacy through World War II. Utilizing the overlooked archival materials of Martin S. Quigley, Jr. and a variety of US sources, this paper uncovers the Holy See’s initial connections to the Hollywood film industry and efforts among the Roman Curia to rein in and utilize US Catholics in the film industry for diplomatic purposes, in the period leading up to and during World War II. As a result, this paper reveals a behind-the-scenes look into the film diplomacy that helped establish stronger relations between the Holy See and the United States, an association that would have significant and lasting effects during the Cold War. ●

## Christian Law and Islam (7th–11th century)

**PROPOSER:** Federico Alpi (FSCIRE/Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)

**CHAIR:** Costanza Bianchi (FSCIRE/Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)

In the crucial half-millennium between the death of the Prophet Muhammad and the First Crusade, an absolutely essential part in the origins of Christian-Muslim relations has been overlooked, namely how the normative regimes of Eastern Christians – including those of Byzantium, the Islamicate world, and the space in between – grappled with the rise of Islam. Exploring this history has important implications for our understanding of the development of Christian-Muslim relations in the premodern period, the genesis of Eastern Christian legal regimes and the earlier precedents which Eastern Mediterranean states after the year 1100 might have drawn on in dealing with Islam. This is the focus of NOMOS, an ERC-awarded project, undertaken at the LMU university of Munich under the leadership of Prof. Zachary Chitwood. For the purposes of this project, the Eastern Christian regimes under scrutiny are those of the Byzantine empire, in Greek, and those of Armenian, Coptic, and Syrian Christians (in Armenian, Coptic, and Syrian respectively). By assembling a corpus of “Saracen law” provisions and utilizing cutting-edge, AI-supported technologies to cre-

ate new editions of legal texts, NOMOS will examine how, within the realm of normative knowledge, the new religion was interpreted, circumscribed, and defined and, moreover, how the encounter with Islam itself shaped long-term developments within Eastern Christian legal regimes. The aim of this panel is to present the preliminary results of the project (which started in the last months of 2025). At the same time, the panel would welcome any attempt to go beyond the project itself, exploring for instance similar patterns of interaction or similar research approaches in the Christian West.

## DEALING WITH THE OTHER IN BYZANTINE LAW: HERETICS, JEWS, PAGANS AND MUSLIMS

**SPEAKER: Z. Chitwood (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)**

This paper seeks to explore the regulation of the religious “other” in Byzantine law during the Long late antiquity by examining how heretics, Jews, pagans, and Muslims were regulated. While analyzing the legal treatment of these first three groups is relatively well-researched and for the most part a straightforward proposition, examining the actual implementation of imperial legislation is more difficult. The regulation of the last of these four groups, Muslims, is even more problematic, because Byzantine law, due to the overriding importance of the Justinianic codification of Late Roman law, was emmeshed in a 6th-century context before the rise of Islam. The terminology used for Muslims in Byzantine legal texts as well as Byzantine literature more broadly was marked by profound variation, so that they were variously classified as Jews, heretics or pagans, but only rarely as an independent group. In this paper both legal texts (civil and canon law) as well as mentions of the legal treatment of non-Orthodox Christians in other sources (hagiography, historiography, etc.) before ca. 1100 will be analyzed to see how Byzantine jurists and secular authorities evaluated and moved between categorizations of the religious “other”.

## REGULATING DEATH: FORMATION OF INHERITANCE LAWS IN SYRIAC LEGAL TRADITIONS

**SPEAKER: N. Jamali (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)**

This paper presents one of the early outcomes of the NOMOS project, focusing on inheritance law within the Syriac legal traditions. In Syriac Christianity, from the 6th to the 11th century and beyond, inheritance law constituted one of the two principal areas of concern for jurist-bishops, alongside family law. In the patriarchal culture of the late antique Near East, including Syriac Christianity, legal norms of inheritance and succession served two closely related domestic aims: the transmission of household property to the next generation and the perpetuation of the household head’s name, that is, family identity, through offspring. In a period marked by intense intellectual exchange, religious competition, and conversion, these domestic aims assumed broader communal significance. Inheritance law became a mechanism for retaining property within the community and preserving a distinct communal identity across generations. Given the strongly patriarchal framework, this continuity was largely dependent on male lineage; any disruption therefore generated legal and social tension. Three recurrent scenarios in particular provoked such crises: the death of a household head without sons, the conversion of a potential heir to another religion (mainly Zoroastrianism and then Islam), and disputes over a widow’s inheritance rights. Against this background, the paper examines the formation of inheritance law in the Syriac legal traditions through an analysis of how Syriac authors responded to these situations in dialogue with Zoroastrian and Islamic legal systems. It draws on selected passages from the Syriac legal corpus, ranging from Simeon of Rewardashir (c. 650) to Yoḥannan bar Abgare (d. 905). These texts, edited with the assistance of AI technology, are analyzed to trace how Syriac inheritance law(s) evolved from a rigid religious to quasi-civil rulings in response to shifting social relations, economic conditions, and religious contestations.

## EMERGENCY COUNCILS? ISLAM-RELATED CANONS IN THREE EARLY MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN SYNODS

**SPEAKER: F. Alpi (FSCIRE/Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)**

This paper re-evaluates a small but significant group of Armenian canon law texts in light of the analytical framework developed by the NOMOS project, which examines the adaptation of Eastern Christian legal regimes to the rise of Islam. It focuses on three synods convened between the Council of Duin (644) and the Council of Partaw (768), a period encompassing the earliest phases of interaction between Christian Armenia and the Islamic world, marked by moments of political instability and crisis. The Council of Duin of 644 introduced specific canonical measures addressing the social and legal disruptions caused by the first Arab incursions into Armenia, particularly in the areas of marriage, inheritance, and church property. More than a century later, the Council of Partaw of 768 was convened against the backdrop of mounting tensions between the Armenian nobility and the newly established Abbasid dynasty. Several of its canons reflect this unstable situation, which would culminate in a major rebellion of the Armenian princes only seven years later. Between these two councils, the Council of Duin of 719 – best known for its doctrinal and liturgical regulations under the leadership of Catholicos Yovhannes Awjneçi – also contains significant indications of the new Islamic reality, suggesting that even non-crisis synods responded to changing political and religious conditions. By placing these councils in closer dialogue with one another, this contribution focuses in particular on canons concerning “foreigners”, a term commonly used in Armenian canonical sources to refer to Muslims. It argues that these synods, whether convened in moments of acute crisis or under longer-term pressure, played a formative role in shaping the Armenian canonical response to Islam.

## PRODUCING AND TRANSMITTING CANONICAL LITERATURE IN COPTIC EGYPT (7TH–11TH CENTURIES)

**SPEAKER: C. Bianchi (FSCIRE/Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)**

This paper offers a preliminary investigation into the relationship between Coptic manuscripts transmitting texts of canon law – understood in a broad sense – and the scribal environments in which these manuscripts were produced and circulated in Egypt between the 7th and the 11th centuries. In addition to strictly normative legal collections, the study also considers texts belonging to the wider category of canonical literature, i.e., works concerned with the organization of Christian life. The aim is to explore the connection between these manuscripts and the places where they were copied and transmitted. Through the examination of codicological features, colophons, scribal notes, and available provenance data, it seeks to identify possible centers involved in the production and circulation of Coptic canonical texts (using also available tools as PAThS database). Particular attention is given to monastic and ecclesiastical milieus that may have functioned as scriptoria for the preservation and dissemination of normative literature. A first mapping of the manuscript evidence allows us to consider whether certain centers played a distinctive role in the transmission of this canonical material. These scribal activities are examined within the broader historical context of Egypt between the 7th and the 11th century, a period that witnessed the transition from Byzantine rule to the Arab conquest and the subsequent centuries of Islamic governance. This political and social transformation profoundly reshaped the conditions in which Coptic Christian communities operated. The paper therefore asks whether the copying and transmission of canonical texts may reflect processes of institutional adaptation, the reorganization of ecclesiastical authority, or strategies aimed at preserving normative traditions in a changing political landscape. ●

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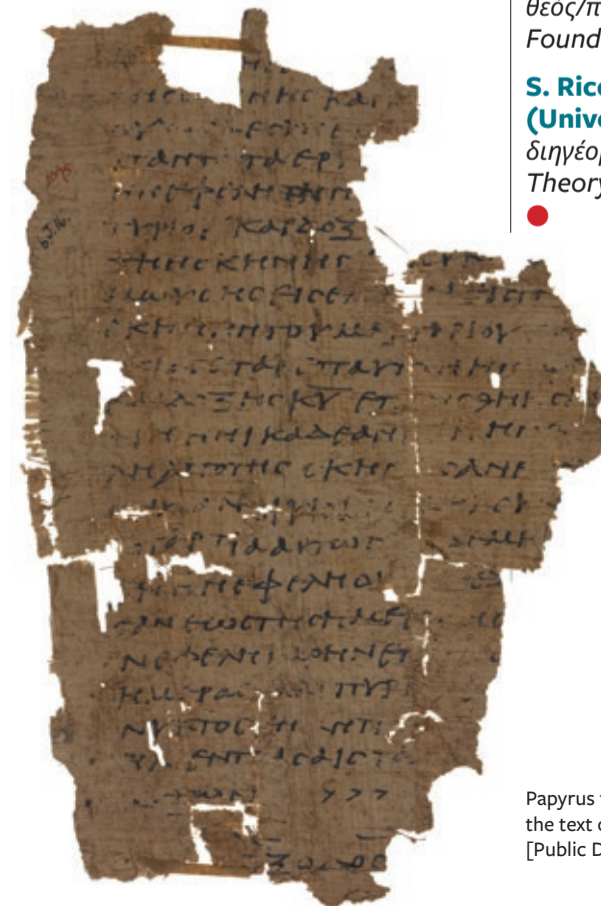
## Annual Workshop of the Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint (HTLS)

**PROPOSITOR AND CHAIR: Daniela Scialabba (Pontifical Biblical Institute/FSCIRE); Eberhard Bons (University of Strasbourg/FSCIRE); Anna Mambelli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE); Laura Bigoni (University of Fribourg)**

The *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (HTLS, ed. by Eberhard Bons and Daniela Scialabba, in collaboration with Anna Mambelli; 4 vols., Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2020–) is a FSCIRE large-scale collective and interdisciplinary project which aims to produce a new research tool: a multi-volume dictionary exploring the meanings, usages, and possible semantic evolutions of the most significant terms or word groups attested in the Septuagint Bible. Each term is analyzed within six sections: (1) Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek; (2) papyri and inscriptions; (3) the Septuagint and its Hebrew equivalents; (4) Jewish literature in Greek; (5) the Second Testament and proto-Christian non-canonical texts; and (6) early Christian literature.

Since the vocabulary of the Septuagint is placed in a much broader context, the *Lexicon* addresses not only biblical scholars, but also classical and patristic scholars, linguists, and historians of religions. As such, the HTLS fills an important gap in the fields of ancient philology, historical research, and religious studies. It contributes to the important debate on the Greek language of the translators, the original function and intended readership of the Septuagint, and its transcultural nature, which conditions both the meaning of the terms and their selection. The different articles of the *Lexicon* are specialized and detailed parts that as a whole promise to show how the Septuagint is one of the most significant works of cultural mediation the ancient world has ever seen. It bridges the Jewish and Greek worlds, and their unique synthesis has shaped Western civilization.

Several volumes in the FSCIRE series align with the methodological framework of the HTLS; the most recent include A. Mambelli, *Vedere sogni. Egesi di Daniele 2 e 4* Old Greek (Marietti 1820, Bologna 2025), and E. Bons, A. Mambelli, D. Scialabba (eds.), *Joy Denied, Joy Rediscovered: From Classical Greek Literature to Byzantine Christianity* (Brill, Leiden 2025).



Another multi-author volume reflecting this same approach has recently appeared: A. Bellantuono, E. Bons, D. Scialabba (eds.), *Between Scroll and Scripture: Studies in Septuagint, Biblical Greek, and Papyri* (Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2026).

This workshop aims to bring together scholars who have contributed lemmas to HTLS volume II to discuss research outcomes and selected case studies illustrating the impact of lexicographical analysis on Septuagint studies.

### SPEAKERS:

**D. Scialabba (Pontifical Biblical Institute/FSCIRE)**  
*Semantic Shifts and Lexical Innovation in the Septuagint: Reflections from the HTLS Project*

**A. Mambelli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)**  
*The HTLS Project: History and Selection of Significant Words in the Septuagint*

**E. Bons (University of Strasbourg/FSCIRE)**  
*The Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint: Preliminary Findings from Volume II*

**A. Bellantuono (Catholic University of Lille)**  
*The Semantic Evolution of θυμός*

**R. Brucker (FSCIRE)**  
*The Use of αἴνος and ἔπαινος in the Septuagint and in the New Testament*

**A. Cacciari (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna)**  
*διαπέω/διαίρεισις in Philo of Alexandria*

**L. Carnevale (University of Bari Aldo Moro)**  
*God as an Enemy, the Enemies of God: A Discussion on the Lemma ἔχθρα/ἔχθραίνω/ἔχθρός*

**F. Caruso (Loyola University Chicago)**  
*The Word εἰκὼν between Classical World and Early Christianity*

**C. Kugelmeier (Saarland University)**  
*From Notion to Understanding: The Word Group of διάνοια and Relatives*

**M. Landolfi (University of Florence)**  
*Observing, Inquiring, Contemplating: Semantic Developments of θεωπέω and θεωρία*

**R. Otranto (University of Bari Aldo Moro)**  
*θεός: Semantics and Uses of the Divine between Literature and Papyri*

**C. Spuntarelli (Sapienza University of Rome)**  
*θεός/πατήρ: Creation as the Ethical Foundation of the Law in Josephus*

**S. Ricciardi and D. Roccotelli (University of Bari Aldo Moro)**  
*διηγέομαι/ἐξηγήομαι: Narrating Across Theory and Practice*

Papyrus fragment containing the text of Exodus 40:26–38 [Public Domain]

## Between Witnessing and Martyrdom: Semantic Shifts and Translation Issues

**PROPONENT:** Francesca Badini (FSCIRE); Laura Bigoni (University of Fribourg); Anna Mambelli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

**CHAIR:** Francesca Badini (FSCIRE); Laura Bigoni (University of Fribourg); Anna Mambelli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

This panel investigates the semantic transformations and translation strategies associated with the concepts of “witnessing” and “martyrdom” from a diachronic perspective. Starting from the foundational texts of the biblical and Qur’anic traditions, the panel examines how specific semantic fields have been rendered, reinterpreted, and at times reshaped in translations and receptions across different historical moments. Particular attention is paid to translational choices as sites of negotiation between philology, theology, and historical contexts, revealing how acts of translation both reflect and produce doctrinal, cultural, and ideological shifts.

Spanning from antiquity to modern languages and cultures, the panel highlights processes of semantic slippage, expansion, and re-semanticization within the lexicon of martyrdom. By foregrounding the interaction between textual tradition, audience, and purpose, it aims to show how translation does not merely transfer meanings, but actively participates in the construction, stabilization, and transformation of religious concepts over time, shaping the ways in which they are understood, mobilized, and reactivated in different religious and intellectual perspectives.

### THE TERMS *ŠAHĀDA* AND *ŠAHĪD* IN SUFI VOCABULARY: SEMANTIC SHIFT AND NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CONCEPTS OF “MARTYRDOM” AND “MARTYR”

**SPEAKER:** R. Budelli (FSCIRE)

Some Sufi figures experienced persecution and martyrdom, especially following accusations of heresy levelled against them by the political and religious authorities of the time. In these cases, it is a death that differs from those falling within the categories of martyrdom provided for in the *ḥadīth*. The most famous examples of *šahīd*, such as Maṣūm al-Ḥallāj (d. 922) or Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (d. 1191), highlight the, sometimes, ambiguous relationship between martyrdom (*šahāda*) and heresy (*zandaqa*). However, the word *šahāda* is also a technical term in Sufi doctrine covering a different semantic field: that of “inner testimony” (*šahādat al-bāṭin*), or the vision and contemplation of the divine that are achieved at the culmination of a long process of spiritual elevation. Sufis distinguish between “inner testimony” and “outer testimony” (*šahādat al-zāhir*), i.e. relating to the common interpretation of death *fi sabīl Allāh*, which they define as “lower jihad”. The language of the Qur’an and the theological-legal language are remodeled in the wake of these new notions, and *fanā’* (the annihilation of the self or “death before death”) becomes a “spiritual testimony/martyrdom”, however temporary. In this paper, we will focus, in particular, on the definitions of *šahāda* and *šahīd* found in al-Ġazālī’s (d. 1111) *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, which sometimes adds new nuances of meaning and interpretation.

### TESTIMONY AND MARTYRDOM: FROM THE SEPTUAGINT TO ITS TRANSLATIONS INTO MODERN LANGUAGES

**SPEAKER:** A. Mambelli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

This paper investigates the use of terms and expressions related to the semantic fields of testimony and martyrdom in selected case studies from the earliest surviving Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. For each selected passage, it also examines the translational choices made in the principal modern-language translations of the Septuagint, aiming to shed light on their diverse interpretative approaches and intentions, as well as the uses, reuses, and semantic developments of this lexicon in different languages, which has endured across the centuries and continues to engage and challenge readers today.

### USE AND ABUSE OF THE WORD “MARTYR” IN RECENT DEBATES

**SPEAKER:** E. Bons (University of Strasbourg/FSCIRE)

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in the use of the terms “martyr” and “martyrdom” that deviates considerably from traditional usage in Jewish and Christian contexts. This development can be observed in the media, but also in the language used by politicians and church leaders. Who is a modern martyr? And what does “faith” or “religion” mean? This paper seeks to describe this linguistic development on the one hand, and on the other hand to identify the political and religious interests behind this usage.

### FROM WITNESSING TO DYING IN THE PATH OF GOD: THE QUR’AN IN ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS (1861–2000)

**SPEAKER:** F. Badini (FSCIRE)

The Arabic root *š-h-d*, from which terms commonly associated with martyrdom in Arabic are derived, never assumes this meaning in the Qur’an, where it is instead used exclusively in the sense of “witnessing”. The notion of martyrdom is expressed in the Qur’anic text through a different formulation, namely that of “one who is slain in the path of God” (*man qutila fi sabīl allāh*). Rather than focusing on the semantic shift produced by post-Qur’anic doctrinal elaborations, this paper aims to examine how Italian translations of the Qur’an (1861–2000) have rendered these two elements. Its goal is to highlight how different translation traditions diverge in their interpretive choices, reflecting not only distinct theoretical approaches to translation, but also, and above all, the audiences for which these translations were intended.

### A MARTYRDOM IS BORN: SEMANTIC EXPANSION AND DECONTEXTUALIZATION OF A WORD IN MODERN ITALIAN

**SPEAKER:** L. Bigoni (University of Fribourg)

The Greek root that leads to modern Western lexicalizations of “martyrdom” is itself a witness to a history of semantic shifts. This paper explores how the concept of voluntary death has been expanded in modern Italian from a merely religious perspective to a more general form of voluntary sacrifice that can happen for reasons of ideology, politics, or class belonging. This semantic expansion, that leads to figurative meanings and decontextualizations, will be explored in a selection of literary sources from the 19th-century Italian context, in relation to the biblical and/or exegetical heritage that might have been triggering the semantic shift.

### WITNESS-LESS MARTYRDOM: FROM MARTYR TO 殉道 (XUNDAO)

**SPEAKER:** V. Bottanelli (FSCIRE)

This paper explores the translation of “martyr” into Chinese from 致命 (*zhiming*) to 殉道 (*xundao*). Rejecting phonetic borrowing, the missionaries opted for a term from the Confucian lexicon, meaning “vanish along with one’s principles”. This choice, however, entailed a significant semantic shift: these classical Chinese expressions carried connotations of ritual “following-in-death” and loyal sacrifice, but was fundamentally witness-less, omitting the essential element of *martyrion* (witness). Through a close analysis of the term’s pre-Christian usage (e.g., Mengzi Jin Xin I. 42) and the Jesuits’ translational rationale, this presentation highlights translation as a site of negotiation.

### RESHAPING THE CONCEPT OF TESTIMONY AND MARTYRDOM IN CHRISTIAN MEDIEVAL CENTRAL ASIA

**SPEAKER:** C. Barbati (University of Pisa)

The religious message brought by the Syriac churches to Central Asia and China between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages was adapted to different local contexts through a process of translation involving different languages – from Syriac to Sogdian, Uyghur, Chinese, Middle Persian – different scripts, text materiality, as well as specific choices of terms and symbols. Translation here should be understood as cultural translation. Given the above, this paper aims to analyze how the concepts of testimony and martyrdom are interpreted and (re)transmitted in the Central Asian Christian context through case studies drawn from hagiographic and martyrological literature in the Sogdian language.

### MARTYRDOM BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS: FROM THE MACCABEES TO THE CONTEMPORARY FAR RIGHT

**SPEAKER:** A. Bellantuono (Catholic University of Lille)

In the Books of the Maccabees, martyrdom appears as an ultimate testimony of fidelity to the law and to the religious identity of Israel in the face of persecution. Emblematic figures such as the mother and her seven sons described in 2 Maccabees, as well as Eleazar, embody a model of death freely accepted in the name of God, in which the religious dimension and the collective identity of the people of Israel are closely intertwined. In the contemporary era, the memory of Israeli soldiers who have fallen in the defense of the State of Israel is sometimes interpreted through symbolic categories that implicitly or explicitly evoke the tradition of martyrdom. Although situated within a profoundly different context, certain public and religious narratives tend to place the soldiers’ death within a broader history of collective survival and of defense of the existence of the Jewish people. Through a comparative analysis of ancient sources and contemporary discourses, this contribution aims to show how the category of martyrdom can function as a device of memory and identity construction, capable of connecting ancient religious traditions with modern forms of national narrative. ●

## Imagining the Enemy: Scriptural Re-Readings After Catastrophe in the Three Abrahamic Traditions

**PROPONENT:** Lucia de Lorenzo (FSCIRE)

**CHAIR:** Francesca Badini (FSCIRE), Laura Righi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

This panel seeks to gather contributions exploring how the sacred scriptures have been employed in the tradition of the three Abrahamic religions, to construct the figure of the enemy in contexts marked by crisis, rupture, catastrophe, or collapse. Without restricting the chronological scope, the panel welcomes case studies from any period, provided that the sources engage with moments of profound instability – whether political, social, cultural, or religious – and reveal how such disruptions prompt intensified engagement with scriptural texts and traditions.

The aim is to examine how exegetical and scripturally informed narratives in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam transform external or internal adversaries into meaningful agents within broader theological interpretations of history. Particular attention will be given to the link between enemy representation and divine punishment: crises are often reframed as consequences of communal transgression, with the enemy functioning as an instrument – willing or unwitting – of divine judgment, a dynamic that simultaneously explains catastrophe and admonishes the community toward repentance, reform, or renewed cohesion.

Contributions may explore a wide range of historical phenomena and sources, such as: the reactivation of scriptural motifs after a military defeat or a political collapse in narrative and exegetical texts; the redefinition of adversaries during periods of sectarian conflict in theological textual controversies or in political discourses; the role of eschatological expectations and elaborations in shaping perceptions of threat; or the deployment of enemy imagery in response to migration, economic disruption, pandemics, or environmental crises through sermons, theological treatises and commentaries. The panel also encourages attention to the material and social dimensions of scriptural interpretation, including how textual transmission, communal leadership, performative settings, or institutional contexts shape the construction of the enemy in moments of upheaval.

### THE ENEMY CLOTHED IN PROPHECY: ANTICHRIST NARRATIVES IN REVOLUTIONARY MILITANCY

**SPEAKER:** I. Abaddi (University of Palermo)

Three concepts pervade Islamic apocalypticism across centuries: the Mahdi, the Antichrist (Dajjal), and Armageddon. These narrative elements provide militant movements with three essential tools: legitimization of authority through messianic claims, demonization of enemies as cosmic evil, and justification for violence through apocalyptic warfare. Mark Juergensmeyer’s concept of “cosmic war” posits that when violence acquires a metaphysical framing, the self becomes God’s infallible instrument while the other transforms into the ultimate cosmic enemy. This represents the most extreme form of othering: casting oneself as a divine agent and one’s adversary as Satan’s manifestation, with eschatological urgency demanding immediate action. This research examines how the Antichrist figure functions within apocalyptic narratives in Sunni Islam, analyzing its role in constructing the theological architecture that enables revolutionary violence.

## CONCEPTUALIZING THE ENEMY IN TIMES OF CRISIS: PROPHETIC MOTIFS AND THE ITALIAN WARS

**SPEAKER: D. Bontempo Scavo (FSCIRE)**

The paper addresses processes of construction and imagination of the enemy in the context of the “horrende guerre d’Italia” affecting the Italian peninsula between the late 15th century and the Sack of Rome in 1527. In a historical setting characterized by a widespread perception of instability, traumatic events were interpreted through religious and prophetic categories that provided frameworks for understanding and meaning-making. Within this context, the paper examines the reactivation of long-standing prophetic and scriptural motifs used to interpret the roles of different political actors. Motifs such as the just-chastiser, the second Charlemagne, or, in an antithetical sense, the new Nero were applied flexibly to various protagonists of the conflict, intersecting with pro-French or pro-imperial readings and contributing to the framing of the enemy as a sign of divine judgement. The figure of Charles V represents one of the key reference points within this constellation of meanings. The paper also considers how prophetic models interacted with political motifs and natural and celestial signs in the context of a crisis perceived as extraordinary, giving rise to shifting configurations of the enemy adaptable to different contexts and actors. From this perspective, the conceptualization of the enemy emerges as a key interpretative device in religious responses to catastrophe.

## LIBERTAS ECCLESIAE AND THE SWORD: OLD TESTAMENT MODELS FOR THE LEGITIMATE EXERCISE OF VIOLENCE IN THE PAPACY OF PASCHAL II

**SPEAKER: A. Lostumbo (Sapienza University of Rome)**

This paper explores Pope Paschal II’s use of violence and the resulting exegetical crisis in the early 12th century, focusing on his letter of 21 January 1103, to Robert, Count of Flanders, and the critical response of Siebert of Gembloux. Paschal II employs Old Testament citations – notably 1 Samuel 15 (Saul and Agag) and Jeremiah 48:10 – to justify armed action by the *milites* in defense of the church and the *libertas ecclesiae*. The enemy is explicitly identified: rebels against God, usurpers of church authority, simoniacs, and the excommunicated. By linking Petrine authority, lay obedience, and biblical precedent, the pope frames warfare as a divinely sanctioned act and a tool for protecting Roman primacy. Siebert’s *Epistola Leodicensium adversus Paschalem papam* exposes the tensions created by this approach. He challenges the materialization of the two-swords doctrine, condemns the grant of *remissio peccatorum* to combatants, and repurposes the same Old Testament texts to argue that violence, even against church enemies, cannot constitute a divine sacrifice. The claim of a “third sword” exemplifies what Siebert sees as a dangerous innovation in canonical and exegetical tradition. This case reveals a broader crisis of interpretation: the Old Testament becomes a battleground for competing visions of ecclesiastical authority. Paschal II uses it to define the enemy and legitimize coercion, while critics like Siebert expose the moral and theological limits of such claims. The correspondence highlights the intersection of papal authority, the construction of the enemy, and the use of biblical precedent in shaping political and religious power. The case of Robert of Flanders thus illuminates how the early 12th-century church navigated the tension between spiritual leadership and coercive action, showing that the legitimacy of violence was deeply entangled with scriptural interpretation and the contested primacy of Rome.

## (RE)CLAIMING THE SCRIPTURE: THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN RUSSIAN WAR PROPAGANDA AND ANTI-WAR MOVEMENTS

**SPEAKER: R. Elsner (University of Münster)**

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has played a significant role in depicting an alleged enemy of the Russian people in metaphysical terms, making extensive use of biblical motifs and narratives. Since Russia’s war against Ukraine began in 2014, these patterns have become more widespread, finding their way into political propaganda and international religious networking. As sermons are the most common means of engaging with the Bible in Orthodox religious practice, they are important vehicles for disseminating this ideology. Patriarch Kirill’s frequent sermons, the most prominent public expression of the ideological basis of the war, provide a case study in the selective use of biblical motifs without any critical analysis of the texts themselves. Other high-ranking public figures in the ROC take a similar approach to the Bible, portraying the world as a battlefield between good and evil and incorporating historical Russian warfare into the biblical concept of divine providence. However, while proponents of the war use biblical motifs to characterize the enemy and justify war as a defense against them, anti-war actors simultaneously engage with the same Bible and sometimes even the same motifs to voice their opposition to the war and its ideology. In their effort to reclaim the biblical tradition for nonviolent conflict transformation and peaceful communal life, they also turn to the biblical images of fighting the enemy and combating evil in order to frame the war and its proponents. This paper aims to analyze the disputes surrounding the correct interpretation of the Bible, as well as the various claims to authenticity and truth amid war propaganda. It also situates the Russian Orthodox case within the broader context of global debates about the Bible as a tool of division and othering, demonstrating the interconnectedness of these discourses and their strategic and political efficacy.

## AN ENEMY REFRAMED: PROVIDENCE AND IDENTITY IN GREGORY THE GREAT’S REPRESENTATION OF THE LOMBARDS

**SPEAKER: L. de Lorenzo (FSCIRE)**

This study examines the complex ideological and theological reconfiguration of the Lombards (*Gens Langobardorum*) within the literary and pastoral production of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604 AD). Through an analysis of the *Registrum Epistolarum*, the *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, and the *Dialogi*, this research argues that Gregory moves beyond mere ethnic vituperation to construct a sophisticated “theology of the enemy”.

The core of this re-evaluation lies in the concept of the providential enemy. While Gregory vividly describes the “sword of the Lombards” as a source of physical devastation, he simultaneously interprets their presence through a meta-historical lens. In his view, the Lombards are part of the “flagella coelestis justitiae” (Hiez II, 6, 22), who intended to purge the sins of the Roman people and the church. This shift transforms the Lombard “menace” from a political catastrophe into a spiritual trial within the context of the approaching end of the world. Furthermore, the study explores the transition from confrontation to conversion. Gregory’s diplomacy suggests a paradigm where the “enemy” is no longer just a scourge to be endured, but a soul to be won. By juxtaposing the brutal imagery of the raids with the miraculous narratives of the *Dialogi*, this research highlights how the Lombard presence serves as a catalyst for a new medieval framework where temporal suffering is reframed as a providential path toward moral renewal.

## FACING THE GREAT BABYLON: AN IMAGE FROM THE APOCALYPSE IN JOACHIM OF FIORE’S POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

**SPEAKER: R. Saccenti (University of Bergamo)**

Joachim of Fiore’s theological thought is characteristically shaped by the prophetic language of Scripture. Prophecy, understood as a mode of interpreting history in the light of biblical revelation, constitutes a cornerstone of his approach not only to the sacred text but also to the interpretation of his own historical context. This use of biblical *figurae*, particularly those of apocalyptic significance, as a means of discerning the sapiential value of human history is especially evident in his treatment of the image of Babylon. Throughout his literary production – from the *De prophetia ignota* to the *Expositio in Apocalysim* – Joachim employed the apocalyptic figure of Babylon in order to address a range of contemporary historical crises: the conflict between empire and papacy, the strained relations between Rome and Constantinople, the fall of Jerusalem in 1187, and the rise of Saladin’s power. This paper traces these various uses of the figure of Babylon in Joachim’s works, demonstrating how it enabled him to articulate an interpretation of the major turning points of the late 12th century that combined acute political concern with a broader reflection on the moral and religious significance of historical events.

## THE DAJJĀL IN IFRĪQIYA: APOCALYPTIC ENEMY CONSTRUCTION DURING THE FATIMID STRUGGLE AGAINST ABŪ YAZĪD (940S)

**SPEAKER: G. Favaretto (University of Palermo)**

The rebellion of Abū Yazīd (d. 947), leader of a Khārijite movement in Ifrīqiya, represented one of the most serious crises faced by the early Fatimid caliphate. During the uprising of the 940s, the Fatimid rule, still in its formative phase, was nearly overthrown by forces that conquered large portions of the territory and threatened the capital al-Mahdiyya. In Ismā’īli historiography, however, this political and military crisis was framed through an explicitly apocalyptic vocabulary. In the account of Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn’s ‘Uyūn al-akhbār, Abū Yazīd is repeatedly described as the Dajjāl, the eschatological deceiver known from Islamic apocalyptic traditions whose appearance precedes the final triumph of the divinely guided leader. This paper argues that the portrayal of Abū Yazīd as the Dajjāl must be understood within the broader eschatological framework through which the early Fatimid regime articulated its legitimacy. The first Fatimid ruler had assumed the title al-Mahdī, while his successor ruled as al-Qā’im, both titles deeply embedded in Islamic messianic and apocalyptic traditions. Within this symbolic horizon, identifying the dynasty’s most dangerous adversary with the apocalyptic enemy allowed the Fatimid imam-caliph to frame the rebellion as part of a cosmic struggle between truth and deception. The paper further suggests that such apocalyptic enemy imagery was particularly mobilized during moments of acute political crisis and gradually receded as Fatimid rule consolidated. ●

## Datasets, Workflows, Software and AIs to Study Religions: What Is New and What Is Ahead?

**PROPONENT: Francesca Cadeddu (FSCIRE)**

**CHAIR: Francesca Cadeddu (FSCIRE)**

The digital turn in religious studies is a shift that is nurtured by the never-ending duality that presents scholars as mere technology consumers or as actors in the production of technology that are able to face the challenge of complexity (ages, cultures, languages, type of sources, type of supports, semantics) that emerges from the scientific field. The panel, promoted by RESILIENCE, the European Research Infrastructure on Religious Studies, is framed to be an open forum for all scholars who make use of advanced technologies in the study of religions. Local, national, and international projects are welcome to present their research and development outputs and outcomes, to reflect on the role played by the research community in the current digital turn and to address one question: can the complexity of our field of study be a driver for technology developments that are applicable in other scientific and commercial domains?

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF USERS, SUPPORTING THEIR UPSKILLING: CHALLENGES FOR RESILIENCE, THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE ON RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**SPEAKER: F. Cadeddu (FSCIRE)**

RESILIENCE, the European Research Infrastructure on Religious Studies closed its preparatory phase with a significant number of achievements which, in some cases, went beyond expectations and opened the way to the full implementation of the RI. The paper will present the most recent developments and their potential benefits to the community of users, to encourage access to its services while also presenting a reflection on the educational and training offer that is available to the community.

## SANCTUARIA: A DIGITAL ARCHIVE OF SANCTUARY FOUNDATION LEGENDS AND EX VOTOS

**SPEAKER: M. Papisidero (University of Palermo)**

This paper aims to present and illustrate the key features of the Sanctuaria tool, developed as part of the activities of WP6 YASMINE of the ITSERR project. The tool brings together legends of early modern shrines and votive offerings (*ex-votos*) from the modern and contemporary periods. These materials offer valuable historical, anthropological, and artistic insights into the religious and cultural history of the centuries concerned. Sanctuaria enables users to perform both precise and semantic searches within the source corpus and provides a wide range of metadata for analytical purposes, together with the geographical localization of the sources on a map. A particularly important feature of the tool is its expandable corpus: dedicated functions allow users (such as individual researchers, groups of students, cultural associations, etc.) to add new legends and *ex-votos*, which are subsequently reviewed by an internal project supervisor.

## EXPLORING DIGITAL METHODS FOR NORMATIVE COMPLEXITY: CANON LAW SOURCES AS DATASETS

**SPEAKERS:** **V.R. Imperia (University of Palermo); A. Pavone (University of Palermo)**

This paper explores the potential of digital methods for addressing normative complexity through the case of canon law sources, approached as a structured dataset rather than as a mere textual corpus. Focusing on the Corpus Iuris Canonici, the contribution examines how a foundational body of religious law – composed of heterogeneous sources such as Gratian’s Decretum, official collections of papal decretals, and later normative collections – poses specific challenges to current digital research practices. The Corpus Iuris Canonici embodies multiple layers of complexity: the coexistence of different normative authorities, the stratification of legal time, the interaction between texts and norms, and the central role of interpretation through glosses and commentaries. When transformed into data, these features raise methodological questions concerning data modeling, semantic annotation, temporal versioning, and the representation of legal relationships within digital workflows. By analyzing canon law sources as datasets, the paper argues that normative complexity is not an obstacle to digital research, but a productive framework for exploring the limits and capabilities of digital methods in the study of religions. The case of the Corpus Iuris Canonici demonstrates how historically grounded legal-religious materials can inform the development of more robust digital approaches, with implications for other normative, institutional, and religious domains.

## READING AUGUSTINE’S CITY OF GOD WITH UBIQUITY: ON THE INTERTEXTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF A CLASSICAL-CUM-CHRISTIAN UTOPIA

**SPEAKER:** **F. Tutrone (University of Palermo)**

This paper approaches Augustine’s treatise *De civitate Dei (The City of God)* as a pivotal work situated between classical political thought and Christian eschatology, arguing that its rich intertextual dimension – which can now be investigated through the uBIQUity platform – plays a crucial role in the development of an extremely original and influential utopian project. Rather than proposing an ascetic withdrawal from civic life, Augustine articulates a dialectical vision in which the earthly and the heavenly cities coexist in the temporal realm, compelling Christians to engage actively in the sociopolitical order while orienting their interior life toward an eschatological fulfillment. Through a close reading of Books 10, 19, and 22 and their intertextual matrix – as reflected in the outputs of uBIQUity – the present paper highlights Augustine’s complex reception of Greco-Roman traditions (particularly Platonism, Stoicism, and Cicero’s *philosophica*) and the ways in which biblical intertextuality reshapes classical models of community, justice, and moral progress. Augustine’s idea of *civitas Dei* emerges as a transitional utopia: simultaneously present and incomplete, grounded in ancient culture and biblical revelation, yet projected toward the final consummation of history.

## A NEW NEURAL NETWORK-BASED ARAMAIC-TO-ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD

**SPEAKERS:** **A. Pavone (University of Palermo); A. Ravasco (University of Palermo)**

The GNORM tool involved the development of a neural network capable of translating the text of the Babylonian Talmud from Aramaic to English. This translation is designed to train an algorithm created specifically for this tool. It aims to find and order the sources within the Babylonian Talmud. This paper aims to highlight the unique nature of the translation developed for GNORM.

## RE-READING PAPAL DOCUMENTS: REGESTA, DIPLOMATICS, AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

**SPEAKER:** **L. Righi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)**

This paper presents the results of the project REVER (Reverse Regesta), which investigates new paths for the study of papal documents by combining the methodological framework of papal diplomatics with artificial intelligence. Although regesta have long played a central role in the organization and study of papal sources, the production of new collections remains a highly demanding scholarly task. REVER addresses this challenge by developing workflows, resources, and tools that support the creation and structuring of regesta within a digital research environment. The project is grounded in a critical analysis and valorization of the editorial tradition of the large documentary corpora produced by the medieval papal curia. Drawing on established historical source collections, the project produced two main outcomes: annotated datasets and the development of Regexta, a digital tool for the study of pontifical documentation. A curated training corpus was created by pairing medieval papal documents with their corresponding regesta and digitized and annotated through customized implementations of eScriptorium and INCEPTION, combining manual and automated strategies while preserving key diplomatic features. Building on this corpus, Regexta was developed as a multilingual, multi-stage tool for the summarization of pontifical documents. By generating new, structured, and semantically consistent regesta in accordance with established diplomatic standards applied to medieval documents, the tool enables the large-scale organization, exploration, and analysis of papal documentary corpora, including digital and born-digital materials.

## INTRODUCING THE PLORABUNT DATASET

**SPEAKERS:** **F. Ruozi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE); A. El Ganadi (FSCIRE)**

Compared to other forms of political violence, attacks against worshippers and places of prayer pose distinctive challenges for systematic data collection, due to their geographic dispersion, uneven reporting practices, and systematic marginalization within broader terrorism datasets. In response, there has been growing scholarly interest in open-source event databases documenting violence against civilians. One of the major limitations of existing resources, however, is that they do not systematically distinguish attacks targeting religious spaces and communities, despite evidence that such incidents constitute a persistent and globally distributed phenomenon. In this paper, we introduce Plorabunt, an open-source dataset and publicly accessible online platform that documents 1,623 fatalities resulting from attacks on places of worship worldwide from 1982 to the present. The dataset was constructed through a curated aggregation and cross-validation of heterogeneous sources, including regional and thematic databases, press archives, NGO reports, diplomatic documents, legal records, and academic literature. Following its initial construction, the research team has undertaken continuous verification, source triangulation, and regular updates to correct inaccuracies, complete incomplete records, and incorporate newly identified cases. This paper describes the data collection and curation methodology underpinning Plorabunt, discusses the strengths and limitations of open-source data for documenting religiously targeted violence, and presents descriptive statistics on the scope, structure, and content of the dataset. By combining structured data with a publicly accessible online platform designed for long-term preservation and access, Plorabunt supports comparative research on violence against places of worship, allowing a wide range of users to examine how patterns of such attacks differ across religious traditions, regions, and historical periods.

## DELINEATING PROFILES OF CULTURAL IMBALANCES BETWEEN DIGITAL HUMANITIES, LIBRARIANSHIP, ISLAMIC STUDIES, AND NON-LATIN SCRIPTS: REFLECTIONS FROM THE DIGITAL MAKTABA PROJECT

**SPEAKER:** **R.A. Vigliermo (Mem s.r.l.)**

This paper examines the intersection of digital humanities, digital libraries, and Islamic studies focusing on the role of librarians in managing and organizing non-Latin script materials. Starting from consideration on the Digital Maktaba project and dataset, the study explores how digital technologies have transformed cataloguing practices, particularly in relation to metadata standards, transliteration, and the representation of Arabic-script texts. By tracing the historical development of digital humanities, digital libraries, and computational methods in text preservation and access the study aims to highlight how previous historical and cultural imbalances are reflected in the digital realm. The main focus revolves around the issue of romanization, its nature, evolution, and role in digital cataloguing processes as a possible cultural obstacle repositing past motives of superiority of a culture onto others, ultimately affecting resources accessibility. The present contribution aims also to analyze the impact of dominant cataloguing frameworks, such as Dewey Decimal Classification and International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD), in shaping access to Islamicate texts and examines how digital libraries, intended as dynamic spaces where technology and humanities converge, address these challenges.

## JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS FRONTISPIECE: AN “LLM-AS-A-JUDGE” APPROACH FOR CONSTRAINED TOPIC IDENTIFICATION

**SPEAKER:** **A. El Ganadi (FSCIRE)**

This paper presents one methodological strand implemented within the broader Digital Maktaba project, which explores AI-assisted workflows for Arabic-script digital libraries. It details a case study centered on the Giorgio La Pira Library in Palermo, addressing the specific challenge of generating semantic metadata for scholarly works when only minimal contextual information, namely a digitized frontispiece containing key data such as the title, author, and publisher, is available. The study relies on a curated subset of 5,900 Arabic-language records, including 2,200 items with digitized frontispieces, extracted from the La Pira Library’s catalogue and used as a controlled evaluation dataset. On the basis of this dataset, a constrained evaluation protocol was implemented to test whether large language models can generate accurate subject topics for a work using only textual information extracted from its frontispiece, without access to external retrieval mechanisms. Model outputs are assessed using an LLM-as-a-judge evaluation protocol anchored to a curated ground-truth topic dataset, enabling systematic comparison of generated topics against expert-derived annotations. The analysis evaluates topic alignment and systematizes recurring AI-induced error (hallucination) typologies, including semantic distortion, fabrication, overgeneralization of subject categories, and misattribution driven by authorial or canonical associations. Overall, this work proposes a replicable evaluation approach for assessing LLM behavior in low-context metadata generation tasks and contributes a benchmark dataset and analytical strategy relevant to digital libraries managing heterogeneous and resource-constrained collections.

## A WORKFLOW FOR DIGITIZING AND SHARING ETHIOPIC MANUSCRIPTS

**SPEAKERS:** **G. Ferrandino (University of Naples L’Orientale); T. Ranieri (University of Naples L’Orientale); A. D’Andrea (University of Naples L’Orientale)**

The introduction of GenAI and machine learning techniques into philological studies is progressively transforming approaches to the digitization of sources. What was formerly a practice primarily aimed at the preservation of often unique paper-based documents has now evolved into an opportunity for a more rapid publication of ancient texts and for the creation of a virtual, interactive digital ecosystem. Systems for the recognition and interpretation of historical documents are achieving increasingly high levels of accuracy, even for less-documented languages, thereby allowing some of the most labor-intensive tasks traditionally undertaken by researchers – such as the reading and transcription of ancient texts – to be delegated to computational tools. The digital resources thus produced must subsequently be encoded in accordance with international standards to ensure their publication, retrieval, preservation, and dissemination, contributing to a redefinition of the concept of documentary archiving. In this context, the metadata creation process plays a central role, as it enables the definition of the entire workflow – both philological and technical – while contributing to the production of scholarly objects that are accessible even to users without advanced technical expertise. This contribution examines the processes of acquisition, transcription, and online publication of a collection of religious manuscripts written in Ge’ez. The documents were transcribed using the Transkribus platform and subsequently encoded with the Oxygen software according to the TEI standard. To ensure interoperability, the metadata were mapped to the Dublin Core schema, a general-purpose descriptive model that nonetheless effectively supports data integration and reusability. Finally, to support scholarly study and analysis, a text annotation system was designed, whose notes can be converted into Dublin Core metadata and associated with the original historical document.

## ARABIC TOPIC MODELING WITH LLMs: A PROMPTING-BASED APPROACH

**SPEAKERS:** **S. Aftar (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia); R.A. Vigliermo (Mem s.r.l.)**

As conventional topic models rely on word co-occurrence to infer latent topics, topic modeling for Arabic literary abstracts presents unique challenges due to Arabic’s morphological complexity and the semantic richness of literary discourse. Large Language Models (LLMs) can potentially overcome these challenges by contextually learning the meanings of words via pretraining. In this paper, we study multiple approaches to using LLMs for Arabic topic modeling: parallel prompting, sequential prompting, hierarchical two-stage prompting, and interactive refinement. To address Arabic specific linguistic characteristics, we investigate three preprocessing strategies, surface forms, root-based extraction using CAMEL Tools, and hybrid enrichment, and evaluate their impact on topic quality. We compare both proprietary models (GPT-4, Claude) and open-source Arabic LLMs (Llama, Falcon, Jais-13b, AceGPT-13B) to assess cost effectiveness for Arabic applications. Our experimental results demonstrate that LLM-based methods can identify more coherent topics than traditional approaches (BERTopic, LDA) while maintaining topic diversity. We introduce Arabic-specific evaluation metrics including root diversity, diacritic-insensitive coherence, and literary term coverage to provide nuanced assessment beyond standard metrics (C<sub>v</sub>, T<sub>U</sub>). Furthermore, we found that domain aware prompting strategies and hierarchical topic discovery enhance the interpretability of topics in Arabic literary contexts, while document coverage analysis confirms minimal topic manipulation.

## DAMSYM: SEMANTIC RETRIEVAL ACROSS MULTIPLE LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

**SPEAKERS:** M. Napolitano (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE); E. Scapini (DREST); F. Iezzi (DREST); I. Panzeca (University of Palermo/FSCIRE); I. Spanò (University of Palermo)

This paper presents the principal outcome of the DaMSyM project (Data Mining: the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbolum), a transformer-based NLP tool for semantic analysis of key phrases and terms within religious tradition across Greek, Latin, Arabic, Old Church Slavonic, Sanskrit, and a combined Greek/Latin solution. To identify semantically significant patterns relevant to the project's primary case study – the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed across various translations – both rule-based and probabilistic architectural approaches have been employed. Specifically, selected Large Language Models (LLMs) were exploited to enable the tool to function across a wide range of Christian texts in the target languages. Featuring these models, DaMSyM facilitates scholars with advanced semantic representations that support the identification of relationships, similarities, and deeper semantic layers within key religious terminology. Data filters and advanced research techniques can also be applied to query corpora to extract granular insights, thereby enhancing understanding of the theological and historical significance of individual passages across diverse translations and interpretations of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and related texts in the languages under consideration. The paper will present the digital specifications of the tool and its language-specific features, demonstrate its contribution to historical-religious research, and acknowledge its current limitations while outlining future development directions within the fields of digital humanities and religious studies, particularly concerning semantic and multilingual analysis.

## HORTUS: AN INTEGRATED AND MODERATED PLATFORM FOR THE DIGITAL TURN IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**SPEAKER:** R. Demo (FSCIRE)

The digital turn in religious studies has intensified a persistent tension: scholars can remain mere “consumers” of digital tools, or become co-designers of the infrastructures that shape research practices in a field marked by heterogeneity of sources, languages, supports, and semantics. This paper presents HORTUS, an integrated digital environment developed within the ITSERR project as a service platform for the RESILIENCE ecosystem designed by the digital humanists themselves. HORTUS combines: (1) a moderated catalogue/marketplace for datasets, publications, software and services; (2) a collaborative workspace for storing, versioning, and sharing research outputs; (3) an integrated training center (e-learning); (4) an experts directory with social interaction features; and (5) hosting IT services capability delivered through dashboards, VRE and scalable computing. The platform is designed for interoperability and secure collaboration: federated authentication and OpenID Connect, role-based authorization, and GDPR-aligned operations underpin access to resources and services, while FAIR-oriented metadata workflows support findability and reuse and enable integration with external repositories (e.g., Zenodo; Zotero). We discuss how the “complexity” of religious studies has directly informed platform design choices – such as moderated contribution workflows and forthcoming capabilities for collaborative annotation, custom metadata sets, and advanced visualization. We argue that these solutions are not only disciplinary enablers but also transferrable patterns for other digital humanities and data-intensive communities, offering a concrete answer to the panel's guiding question about complexity as a driver for broader technological innovation.

## DARMAB: A DIGITAL PROJECT ON THE ARMENIAN MAP IN BOLOGNA (BUB, ROT. 24)

**SPEAKERS:** F. Citti (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna); G. Bitelli (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna); A. Sirinian (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna)

The DARMAB project aims at the study and digital enhancement of the *Tabula Chorographica Armenica* in a broadly interdisciplinary context. The *Tabula*, now on display in the Marsili Museum of the Library of the University of Bologna, is an enormous map made in Constantinople in 1691 on commission of the Bolognese Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsili. Over three and a half meters long, it depicts hundreds of monasteries and shrines of the Armenian Church through colorful drawings and captions in Armenian. In a digital environment, the Armenian map can become a collector of an immense amount of heterogeneous multimedia information, associated with the individual elements of the *Tabula* and freely exploratory by the visitor in an immediate and direct way.

## IXTHEO: RESEARCH TOOL AND RESEARCH ANALYSIS

**SPEAKER:** M. Fassnacht (University Library of Tübingen)

The Index Theologicus (IxTheo) is one of the most comprehensive open access databases for theology and religious studies, created and curated by the University Library of Tübingen in collaboration with (inter)national partners. This paper presents current developments that are taking IxTheo beyond its function as a pure search platform. Thousands of researchers already have personal profile pages within IxTheo, more than 500 of which contain a complete scientific oeuvre and a high proportion of open access publications. In the future, authors will be able to curate their own pages – a step towards a personalized research service. At the same time, IxTheo is developing into a tool for research analysis: the systematic collection of metadata over centuries enables the analysis of publication dynamics, thematic focal points, and international research collaborations. A needs analysis has further confirmed the necessity of systematic documentation of DH- and AI-based theological research. IxTheo is therefore setting up its own collection for digital humanities and digital theology, in which projects, publications, research data, and codes are documented – supplemented by regular DH lunchtime talks with international partner networks.

## SEEING MARY: MARIAN ICONOGRAPHY BETWEEN VISUAL CULTURE, RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND GAZE STUDIES

**SPEAKERS:** F. Ruozzi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE); M. Papisidero (University of Palermo); A.P. Di Cosmo (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)

This paper presents an innovative, large-scale experimental study on the perception of Marian iconography, combining eye-tracking methodologies with survey-based data collection in a digital environment. The research involves a substantial and diversified sample of participants who are invited to observe selected Marian images on screen while simultaneously providing structured responses through an integrated questionnaire. The project is developed by ITSERR WP6 in collaboration with UNGUESS, enabling access to a wide user base and the collection of high-volume, demographically varied data. The study aims to investigate how viewers engage visually and cognitively with Marian representations across different historical periods and stylistic traditions. The project is inherently interdisciplinary, bringing together gaze studies, history of Christianity, visual history, and art history. By scaling up experimental approaches traditionally limited to laboratory settings, this research proposes a new methodological framework for the analysis of religious visual culture. ●

## PANEL 10

# Septuagint Studies – Towards Volume II of the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint (HTLS): Outcomes and Perspectives*

**PROPOSER:** Anna Mambelli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)  
**CHAIR:** Laura Bigoni (University of Fribourg)

The international project on the vocabulary of the Septuagint that is behind the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (ed. by Eberhard Bons and Daniela Scialabba, in collaboration with Anna Mambelli; 4 vols., Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2020–) is close to the publication of its second volume, with lemmas from *delta* to *iota*. This panel aims to bring together scholars that have been working on these lemmas to discuss research outcomes and selected examples of the impact of lexicographical analysis on Septuagint research, exploring both its context of origin and its early reception.

The issues explored by the panel include: (1) Septuagint lexicography and translation techniques; (2) Septuagint vocabulary in relation to the Greek world; (3) the contribution of the Septuagint to the history of the Greek language; (4) the impact of Septuagint vocabulary on Jewish and early Christian authors.

## CONSTRUCTING, DESCRIBING, AND RE-SEMANTIZING ANCIENT SLAVERY IN THE SEPTUAGINT AND EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

**SPEAKER:** A. Mambelli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

This paper examines the specific lexical choices made by the Septuagint translators on the theme of slavery, which carry significant exegetical implications both within the Greek Bible and in its reception in early Christian literature. In particular, it focuses on the use of the term *δοῦλος*, which in non-biblical Greek refers to a “slave” with no personal rights and is used almost consistently in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *‘ebed* in contexts describing human beings' relationship with the God of Israel. The paper also presents selected findings from the lexical research conducted in preparation for the corresponding HTLS article.

## THE IDEA OF HOPE IN THE SEPTUAGINT AND IN PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

**SPEAKER:** E. Bons (University of Strasbourg/FSCIRE)

Compared with its usage in non-biblical Greek, the noun *ἐλπίς* undergoes a semantic evolution in the Septuagint and in Jewish literature of the Hellenistic and Roman epoch. Rather than referring to a more or less positive expectation, the noun very often is used in the context of faith. Believers hope that they can trust in God in their various hardships, even they confess that God himself is their hope. On the other hand, authors like Philo claim that hope is a fundamental feature of human existence. The aim of this paper is to outline the specific new developments in the use of *ἐλπίς* in the Septuagint and in Philo of Alexandria.

## HOW FAR IS ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΗ A BIBLICAL LEXEME? TRACING THE ROOTS OF KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN THE SEPTUAGINT AND EARLY CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

**SPEAKER:** L. Bigoni (University of Fribourg)

The Greek root *episteme* in the Greek Bible is *prima facie* a straightforward way of speaking about knowledge, yet the nuances of what knowledge can mean are manifold, and the root naturally crosses genres and eras within Greek literature and available documentary sources before reaching the translators of the Septuagint. However, its legacy is correspondingly relevant to a lexicographical study of the Greek Bible, since it can shed light on how a root may live on and migrate from one text to another while carrying the memory of where it comes from. This paper aims to explore the role of the root in the works of early Christian authors, tracing possible cases of intertextual reflections from the Greek Bible, in conversation with other roots expressing a similar meaning, to underline the specific nuances and strategies of “biblical memory” when these authors approached the idea in different contexts. The material presented in this paper will be exposed in paragraph 6 of the corresponding HTLS article, related to early Christian literature.

## IS THE FOREIGN AN ENEMY? SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE LEMMA ΞΕΘΡΟΣ FROM CLASSICAL GREEK TO THE LXX

**SPEAKER:** L. Carnevale (University of Bari Aldo Moro)

Etymologically, the word *ἐχθρός* has the same root of the Latin word *extra*: this emphasizes the original meaning of the lemma as indicating a person coming from outside, hostile because foreigner. In fact, to designate the enemy in war, the ancient Greek language uses the lemma *πολέμιος*, often as a substantive (“adversary”). As a result, it seems that in the classical Greek world the concept of being hostile is not semantically associated with the idea of the enemy in war, and *ἐχθρός* works simply as the opposite of *φίλος*. In the LXX, on the contrary, the lemma *πολέμιος* appears rarely. In fact, the technical meaning of “enemy of war”, appropriate to *πολέμιος*, in the LXX is absorbed by *ἐχθρός*. Starting from these observations, the paper will explore the different meanings of the lemma *ἐχθρός* in the Greek world and in the LXX, where it occurs more than 400 times.

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE COMPASSIONATE? CONSIDERATIONS ON THE USE OF THE ADJECTIVE ΕΛΕΗΜΩΝ IN THE SEPTUAGINT, JEWISH-HELLENISTIC LITERATURE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

**SPEAKER:** D. Scialabba (Pontifical Biblical Institute/FSCIRE)

The aim of this paper is to investigate the adjective *ελεήμων* (compassionate, merciful). The analysis will be conducted on the biblical texts against the background of the Hebrew text and of classical and Hellenistic Greek literature. Consideration will also be given to pseudepigraphal writings as well as to Jewish literature in Greek, with the purpose of identifying both continuity and discontinuity in the use of the term *ελεήμων* across the various *corpora*.

## ΘΥΜΟΣ BETWEEN GREEK LITERATURE AND THE SEPTUAGINT: SEMANTIC AND THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

**SPEAKER: A. Bellantuono**  
(Catholic University of Lille)

This article examines the semantic trajectory of the term θυμός, tracing its transition from a dynamic and multifaceted concept in Greek literature to a term charged with religious connotations in the Septuagint. The analysis begins with Euripides' Medea, where θυμός appears as an irresistible force that surpasses rational deliberation. It then proceeds through the works of Homer, Hesiod, Plato, and other authors, in which θυμός is consistently presented as the seat of emotional vitality, often external to the rational self and closely linked to the inner conflict between reason and passion. By contrast, in the Septuagint θυμός is used primarily to designate divine anger, frequently associated with ὀργή. Its nuanced psychological and existential dimensions are largely absorbed into a moral and cultic framework. Nevertheless, in certain wisdom texts – such as Job, Proverbs, and the Wisdom of Solomon – echoes of its classical usage remain, where θυμός once again evokes a spontaneous, and at times irrational, emotional force. Through a diachronic analysis, this study shows how the concept of θυμός was reshaped by the translators of the Septuagint in order to adapt it to Jewish paradigms, while still preserving, in some passages, the semantic resonance inherited from classical Greek literature.

## FATED OR REQUIRED? TRACING ΔΕΙ FROM SOCIAL CUSTOMS TO ESCHATOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT IN THE SEPTUAGINT

**SPEAKERS: G. Negri (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna); C. Nadini (University of Rome Tor Vergata)**

The use of the crystallized third-person singular forms of the verb δέω is fairly consistent throughout Greek literature, both in syntactic construction and in semantic value. It conveys meanings such as “it is necessary”, “one must”, or “it is fitting”. In the majority of attestations from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, δεῖ appears primarily to refer to logical or epistemic necessity. Furthermore, it designates ethical and religious obligations arising from systems of civic, moral, and cultic law. Contrary to what might be expected from the wide range of nuances found in other Greek literature, the Septuagint employs δεῖ only sporadically and with a rather stable semantic value. In fact, the verb here tends to assume a meaning closely connected with legislative practice and, even more frequently, with social customs. Only rarely does it refer to the divine will. At times a moral or religious nuance may be perceived, yet any reference to predestination or providential necessity – attested in certain occurrences within Greek literature – appears to be absent. This tendency is completely reversed in the Book of Daniel. Here, in most occurrences, the use of δεῖ becomes fixed in the formula ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι, which carries a distinctly eschatological sense. This meaning will prevail in the Apocalypse and in the Gospels. In the latter it is also accompanied by a notion of predestination that is embodied in the figure of Jesus and in his fulfillment of scriptural prophecies. This paper seeks to show this pattern through the discussion of several significant passages. ●

P A N E L 1 1

## Norms and Normativity after Vatican II: Processes, Sources, Models, and Centers of Normative Production after the Council

**PROPOSER: Davide Gardini (DREST)**  
**CHAIR: Massimiliano Proietti (FSCIRE)**



Within the framework of the historicization of the post-Vatican II period, research carried out so far has primarily highlighted the need for a change of perspective, reflecting and concretizing the broadening of outlook that the council itself sought to promote. Along this trajectory, this panel aims to engage directly with the dynamics of the implementation of the council, focusing in particular on the issue of the normalization of Vatican II. The panel therefore aims to highlight this phase of normalization by investigating its different moments and key turning points, and by bringing to light the crucial issues that emerged during the conciliar implementation phase. The panel will thus address the topic from the analytical perspective of this process of normalization, focusing in particular on: (1) Post-Vatican II norms: the production of normative documentation within local churches (dioceses and diocesan synods; episcopal conferences); the drafting of the Codex Iuris Canonici and the Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium; the elaboration, promulgation, reception, and effects of decrees and documents issued by the Holy See from Paul VI to Francis, or by bodies established in the post-conciliar period (post-conciliar commissions, Curial dicasteries), which marked turning points in the post-conciliar era; the activity of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. (2) Vatican II as a norm: conflicts surrounding the implementation of Vatican II; conciliar ecclesiology in relation to the reform of the Roman curia and the development of the Synod of Bishops; the normative status of the conciliar corpus itself for subsequent theological reflection and for the practices of local churches.

## A FUNDAMENTAL LAW OF THE CHURCH: ADOPTING ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS IMPULSES FROM THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

**SPEAKER: B. Berkmann (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)**

The fundamental law of the church (Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis) would have been an opportunity to translate the ecumenical and interreligious impulses initiated by Vatican II into canon law. The council renewed the Catholic Church's attitude towards other Christian churches and non-Christian religions by using the model of concentric circles in both *Lumen gentium* and *Nostra aetate*. The Catholic Church does not appear as separate from the others anymore, but, while remaining at the center, maintains a relationship of varying proximity or distance. The last draft of the Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis, dating from 1980, adopted the model of concentric circles in its first article: can. 6 considered Catholics, can. 7 Christians in *communio non plena*, and can. 8 non-Christians and catechumens. Initially, the project to draft a fundamental law for the church attracted considerable ecumenical attention. The Working Group of Protestant and Catholic Canon Lawyers and Theologians in Heidelberg even drafted its own version in 1971. However, distorted ecumenical assumptions ultimately contributed to the project's demise. On

the one hand, there was a mistaken expectation that the fundamental law should provide a basis for the whole of Christendom, but on the other hand, it was accused of usurping non-Catholic communities. In reality, it claimed validity only for the Catholic Church, but would have clarified the legal relationship with other communities. By limiting itself to a core set of norms uniform for the entire Catholic Church, the fundamental law would have marked the scope for legitimate diversity in the universal church. The speaker points out that the draft, nevertheless, retains its importance for legal relations with other churches and religious communities.

## RECONFIGURING JUDICIAL AUTHORITY: THE DOCTRINE OF DELICTA CONTRA SEXTUM IN THE 2021 REFORM OF BOOK VI OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW

**SPEAKER: A. Profeta (DREST)**

Within the canonical penal system, the so-called *delicta contra sextum* – offences committed against the Sixth Commandment – have traditionally constituted a distinct normative category, characterized by particular gravity and by relevance for the protection of ecclesiastical public order and the *salus animarum*, the ultimate end of canon law. Already within the Corpus Iuris Canonici, and even more clearly in the doctrinal elaborations of the post-Tridentine age, such offences were conceived not merely as violations of Christian morality, but as conduct capable of affecting the juridical integrity of the ecclesial community itself. The codification of the 1917 Codex Iuris Canonici systematized these offences within the category of the *delicta contra bonos mores* (canons 2357–2363), establishing a structured regime of canonical penalties. After Vatican II, however, the penal dimension of canon law experienced a phase of marginalization, shaped by anti-judicial and anti-penal tendencies that marked sectors of post-conciliar canonical culture. The 1983 Code nevertheless preserved the centrality of these offences, particularly with regard to clerics, most notably in canon 1395. In recent decades, renewed attention to the penal dimension of canon law has prompted a process of normative reconfiguration, culminating in the reform of Book VI of the Code of Canon Law promulgated through the apostolic constitution *Pascite gregem Dei* (2021), which profoundly reshaped the penal discipline of the Latin Church. Against this background, the paper reconstructs the genesis and normative evolution of the *delicta contra sextum*, arguing that the recent reform should not be understood merely as a technical updating of existing provisions, but rather as the renewed assertion of the church's *potestas puniendi* and a more explicit configuration of canon law as a juridical instrument aimed at safeguarding both the integrity of the ecclesial community and the dignity of persons.

## PAUL VI AND THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH: DOCTRINAL POLICY AND NORMATIVE PRODUCTION AFTER VATICAN II

**SPEAKER: A. Sintoni (FSCIRE/DREST)**

After Vatican II, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, previously Holy Office, saw an exponential increase in the production of normative or doctrinal texts aimed at explaining in an increasingly detailed way the stance of the church's magisterium on various aspects of faith and morality. Thus, the period between 1966 and 1978 sees the redaction of an array of documents of different literary genres by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, focusing on a variety of different themes: from the reception of Vatican II to infallibility, celibacy, and sexuality. A survey of these documents and how the Congregation structures its activity after Vatican II can shed light on the workings of the formerly most powerful congregation of the Roman curia after Vatican II.

## THE LEX ECCLESIAE FUNDAMENTALIS AND THE PROBLEM OF THE CODEX AFTER VATICAN II

**SPEAKER: D. Gardini (FSCIRE/DREST)**

This paper aims to analyze the problem of the new Codex in light of the proposal and the debates surrounding the Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis, the project of a constitutional charter for the church conceived as a single introduction to the Latin and Eastern codifications. Although never approved, its canons were incorporated into the new Latin Codex, thereby limiting the possibility for the church to develop a more effective implementation of the decisions of Vatican II.

## THE STANDARDIZATION OF VATICAN II: ECCLESIOLOGICAL LANGUAGE IN THE HOLY SEE'S MAGISTERIUM (2000–2025)

**SPEAKER: F.M. Corvo (FSCIRE)**

The paper investigates the post-conciliar “normalization” of Vatican II by mapping the standardization of ecclesiological language in the Holy See's magisterium from 2000 to 2025. It classifies formulaic patterns that describe papal-episcopal relations (“cum N.,” “sub N.,” “cum N. et sub N.”) and their main competitors (“in communione cum N.,” “sub auctoritate N.,” etc.), as well as the principal referent-families (petrine, pontifical, sedeological...). The results highlight shifting preferences across three pontificates, including the growing stabilization of “cum Petro et sub Petro” as a condensed ecclesiological “signature”.

## DEALING WITH EXPECTATIONS AFTER NOSTRA AETATE 4: EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES ELABORATING GUIDELINES ON RELATIONS TO JEWS (1965–1973)

**SPEAKER: C. Maligot (FSCIRE)**

By the time the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity issued its official “guidelines and suggestions to implement *Nostra aetate 4*”, episcopal conferences in the United States (1965), France (1967), and Belgium (1969) had already formed ad hoc committees on relations with Judaism and drafted their own texts. As I trace the political, ecclesiological, and theological tensions that shaped the French and US drafting process, I argue these guidelines must be understood not only in relation to the council declaration they sought to implement but also in competition with a broader set of post-conciliar documents. Catholic experts on Judaism and advocates of dialogue sought to widen the interpretive framework to include political theology, an area deliberately avoided at Vatican II, but which they saw as implied by its teaching on Covenant. Their efforts increasingly met resistance from bishops and/or from the Conférence des évêques de France general assembly, as Catholic opinion shifted in front of the Arab-Israeli conflicts after 1967 and 1973. Divergences between expert committees and the episcopal bodies that created them highlight the power dynamics between expertise, hierarchy, and the search for consensus in post-conciliar collegiality. These committees grappled with how their work not always aligned other (pontifical and episcopal) statements on Palestine, refugees, and world peace, and with public expectations (both Jewish and Catholic) that church authorities should “not remain silent” and move beyond the diplomatic neutrality reproached to the Vatican. *Nostra aetate* thus prompted a specific “multilateral” reception of Vatican II, where audience and public theology became key issues. The French committee's work unfolded alongside parallel Jewish efforts to assess Christianity from a Jewish perspective. As the project of a joint commission failed, Jewish partners were consulted during the writing process and provided critical feedback. In this way, the issue of audience contributed to shape the ways to elaborate post-conciliar frames of interpretation of *Nostra aetate 4*. ●

## Sacred Spaces Under Threat: New Approaches to Documenting and Understanding Violence

**PROPOSER:** Federico Ruozi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE); Amina El Ganadi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia /FSCIRE)

**CHAIR:** Federico Ruozi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

Within religious traditions, violence in spaces of prayer may be interpreted as a paradigmatic form of moral and communal rupture, drawing on foundational narratives of fratricide when directed at worshippers and of sacrilege when targeting sacred space. From a scholarly perspective, however, contemporary efforts to study such violent attacks face a methodological paradox: despite their global persistence, they remain fragmented across existing datasets, undertheorized in violence studies, and unevenly documented. Scholars thus face a twofold challenge: documenting attacks that are inconsistently classified across sources, while also developing analytical frameworks capable of accounting for both shared patterns of violence and dynamics specific to the religious contexts where these events occurred. This panel, built around the emerging research carried out by a group of historians in Bologna, Italy, on the documentation and analysis of attacks against worshippers in religious spaces, is conceived as an open forum for scholars investigating violence against worshippers and sacred sites across different religious traditions, regions, and methodological approaches. Contributions are welcomed from researchers studying the origins of this phenomenon or specific cases, developing documentation practices, analyzing patterns of attack, or examining institutional and community responses to such violence. The panel will include presentations drawing on Plorabunt, a newly developed global dataset documenting attacks on places of worship, alongside contributions based on archival research, historical and philological-exegetical analysis. The panel addresses a central question: to what extent can the systematic study of violence against places of worship – grounded in improved documentation, cross-regional comparison, and scientific dialogue – both deepen scholarly understanding and respond to the urgent concerns of religious communities facing recurrent threats?

### BEYOND GENESIS: CAIN, FRATRICIDE, AND VIOLENCE IN EARLY JEWISH INTERPRETATION

**SPEAKER:** G. Ibbá (Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Centrale/Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose della Toscana)

This paper explores how the story of Cain and Abel was reinterpreted in early Jewish literature beyond the biblical account of Genesis 4. In Second Temple and early Rabbinic traditions, Cain increasingly emerges as an archetypal figure of violence and moral transgression. By examining texts such as Jubilees, 1 Enoch, and rabbinic interpretations, the paper shows how the first fratricide became a key paradigm for reflecting on human violence and conflict.

### PLORABUNT: MAPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST WORSHIPPERS IN SACRED SPACES

**SPEAKER:** A. El Ganadi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

Research on religious violence has increasingly relied on event-based datasets and digital archives, yet attacks on places of worship remain poorly captured as a distinct analytical object. Such attacks are often dispersed across heterogeneous sources and absorbed into broader categories of terrorism, hate crime, or ethnic conflict, obscuring the specific spatial, symbolic, and communal dimensions of violence directed at worshippers in sacred space. This paper presents Plorabunt, an open-access digital archive and global dataset developed to document violence against places of worship worldwide from 1982 to the present. At the time of presentation, the dataset records more than 1,623 fatalities and is built through curated integration and cross-validation of diverse materials, including press archives, NGO reports, legal and diplomatic documents, regional databases, and scholarly sources. Rather than treating data as a neutral record, the project foregrounds questions of classification, provenance, uncertainty, and iterative revision as central components of its digital design. The paper outlines the data modeling and curation choices underpinning Plorabunt and reflects on their epistemic implications for the digital study of religion and violence. By combining structured data with a publicly accessible and sustainable digital platform, Plorabunt supports comparative and longitudinal analysis across religious traditions, regions, and historical contexts, while also serving as a case study in how digital infrastructures shape what can be known, compared, and interpreted about violence involving religious communities and sacred spaces.

### OPERATION BLUE STAR AS VIOLENCE AGAINST SACRED SPACE: TRAUMA, VIOLENCE, MARTYROLOGY, AND SIKH COLLECTIVE MEMORY

**SPEAKER:** S. Shahnawaz (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)

In this research paper, the case study of Operation Blue Star (18 June 1984) as a paradigmatic experience of violence against sacred space in postcolonial South Asia is discussed. It claims that the attack of the Harmandir Sahib complex in Amritsar cannot be sufficiently attributed to use of the confined terms of counter-insurgency, public order, or anti-militancy operations. The action should be seen, instead, as a theological, symbolic, and institutional assault on the sacred heart of Sikh life. Based on historical analysis, Sikh studies, ritual theory, memory studies, and the idea of symbolic violence, this research analyzes four dimensions of the case that change over time: the political crisis that led to the violent attack on temple; the nature and timing of the military action itself; the deaths of the worshippers; and the long-term change in Sikh worship, memory, and identity since June 1984. They especially focus on the demolition of the Akal Takht, the assault and violence on the martyrdom remembrance of Guru Arjan Dev Ji, and how Blue Star was later integrated into Sikh *shaheed* memory and diasporic memory. The paper argues that the military force was not terminated when the operation came to life. Its influences were long lasting in liturgy modification, reconstruction of the memorials, yearly commemorations and the lack of accountability. In this respect, we cannot think of Blue Star as a particular security event but as a violent attack on the space of the sacred whose post-lived experiences have continued to be constitutive of Sikh collective consciousness. Taking sacred space as an important unit of analysis, rather than its passive context, this research case study tries to introduce new directions to larger project of Plorabunt by discussing of political violence, religious sites, collective violence, and the extended temporal consequences of places of worship attacks.

### RECONFIGURING FRATRICIDE: CAIN AND ABEL IN Q. 5:27–32

**SPEAKER:** F. Badini (FSCIRE)

The figures of Qābil and Hābil, whose names are elaborated only in post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition, are introduced in the Qur'an in Q. 5:27–32 through the brief and allusive narrative of Adam's two sons. While clearly resonating with the biblical account of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16), the Qur'anic version presents a markedly concise retelling that presupposes prior familiarity with the story and leaves much of its contextualization to later exegetical elaboration. This contribution offers a close reading of Q. 5:27–32, examining its narrative structure.

The paper first introduces the Qur'anic passage and outlines its reception in classical Islamic exegesis. Particular attention is paid to key terms such as *bi-l-haqq* (“with truth” or “in truth”, or “truly”) and *qurbān* (“sacrifice”), and to the ethical and legal concerns that shape exegetical interpretations of fratricide, sacrifice, and divine justice. The analysis then turns to contemporary scholarship on the biblical subtext of Q. 5:27–32, engaging with the methodological approaches developed by Reynolds, Cuypers, Firestone, Pregill, and Zellentin, among others.

By bringing classical Islamic exegesis into conversation with modern studies of Qur'anic intertextuality, this paper argues that the Cain and Abel narrative functions as a privileged site for observing how the Qur'an reworks earlier traditions while articulating a distinctive moral and theological vision.

### THE CONTESTED MEANING OF MEMORY MARKERS: CHURCHES, GENOCIDE, AND THE MAKING OF HERITAGE IN RWANDA

**SPEAKER:** S. Cristofori (FSCIRE/Link Campus University)

This paper proposes an interpretation of the memorial configuration of the genocide against the Tutsi by analyzing how certain churches – which in 1994 became sites of massacres – have been transformed into heritage sites. The study examines both the genocidal acts committed within these churches, the historical depth and construction of the fratricidal hatred that motivated them, and the complex ways in which their memory is articulated today. It draws on a multi-source methodology, including field observations of the sites; trial records from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which allow for the reconstruction of concrete dynamics of violence; and documentation from the Plorabunt database concerning interactions between the Rwandan Episcopal Conference and the post-genocide government between 1996 and 1998, aimed at establishing a shared policy of memory and the heritagization of genocide churches.

### CAIN, ABEL, AND THE ORIGINS OF NON-CAPITAL PUNISHMENT: RABBINIC INTERPRETATIONS AND THE PARADIGM OF THE CITY OF REFUGE

**SPEAKER:** F. Dal Bo (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)

This paper examines the Cain and Abel narrative as a foundational text for conceptualizing punishment for unintentional homicide. It develops a rabbinic interpretive hypothesis: that Cain did not act with full murderous intent, since no human had previously been killed and the lethal consequences of violence were unknown to him. Rabbinic literature uses this premise to address a core tension – Cain commits homicide yet escapes death, instead receiving divine protection and exile. Rather than treating this as inconsistency, rabbinic interpretation transforms it into a legal distinction between intentional and unintentional killing, making Cain the prototype of the unintentional murderer. This tradition links Cain's exile to the biblical cities of refuge, reframing his wandering as paradigmatic sanctuary. The paper concludes by tracing this paradigm in modern thought, particularly Levinas' reading of the West as a juridical space oriented toward integration and protection rather than purely punitive ends.

### TERRORISM AS DEVIATION FROM THE MIDDLE-WAY: RACHID GHANNOUCHI'S REACTION TO JIHADIST ATTACK IN TUNISIA

**SPEAKER:** F. Cargnelutti (independent researcher)

The first international terrorist attack committed by al-Qaeda after 9/11 was executed in Tunisia on 2 April 2002. The target was al-Ghriba Synagogue, in the island of Djerba, and the suicide attacker killed 19 people and left 30 wounded. This presentation focuses on the reaction to such a crime of the main Tunisian Islamist movement, Harakat al-Nahda. More in particular, it analyzes the condemnation of the leader of the movement, Rachid Ghannouchi, whose reaction to the attack, and to terrorism in general, can be unpacked into different elements. These include the condemnation of the killing of Muslims, Jews, and Christians; the condemnation of al-Qaeda as an organization that damages, instead of strengthening, Islam; the description of the international context as dominated by a Zionist-American alliance that created the conditions for the spread of terrorism; the criticisms against the Tunisian state that is considered co-responsible because of its detachment from the Islamic values of the Tunisians, and because of its illiberal regime that impedes the diffusion of a moderate Islamic movement. This presentation is based on the analysis of Ghannouchi's interviews and writings published in the years after the attack.

### THE VIOLENT CONTESTATION OF SPACE: A MASSACRE OF CHRISTIANS AT THE HANDS OF CHRISTIANS IN LATE ANTIQUE ROME

**SPEAKER:** M. Proietti (FSCIRE)

Between the 4th and 6th centuries, in the wake of the Christological controversies associated with the so-called Arian crisis, Rome witnessed the coexistence of Christian communities of differing theological orientations. In certain cases, this situation either resulted from or led to the election of rival bishops for the same city, beginning with the well-known case of Liberius and Felix. Such episodes generated fierce disputes over Christian urban spaces at a time when the topography of the classical city was undergoing profound transformation through the construction of the great Christian basilicas – structures that themselves became focal points of intra-Christian conflict. It is within this framework that the episode examined here takes place. In the context of the double election of Ursinus and Damasus, a Roman basilica – identified either as the Basilica Sicinini or the Liberian Basilica – became the site of the killing of 137 Christians gathered there for liturgical celebration. While the *Liber pontificalis* remains a fundamental source for cases of double election, the reconstruction of this episode of intra-Christian violence requires engaging not only the *Collectio Avellana* but also the “pagan” account of Ammianus Marcellinus. The convergence of these sources reveals the religious and political motivations underlying the violence, set against the broader transition from “pagan” to Christian Rome. ●

## The Russo-Ukrainian War: Historical Roots, Religious Divisions, and Identity-Based Conflicts

**PROPOSER:** Marianna Napolitano (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

**CHAIR:** Marianna Napolitano (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

This panel builds upon and expands the discussion initiated by the volume *Religious and Identity-Based Roots of the War in Ukraine*, published by Routledge in January 2026. The panel explores the Russo-Ukrainian war through its deep historical roots, religious dimensions, and identity-based conflicts, examining how religious narratives intersect with state power and identity formation in both post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine. A crucial focus is the 2018–2019 recognition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine’s autocephaly by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, representing a fundamental rupture in Orthodox unity with profound geopolitical implications. The Moscow Patriarchate considered this act a direct challenge to its authority and to its historical and traditional relationship with Ukraine. Papers will examine the Russkyi Mir ideology and how this notion shapes church-state relations and provides the theological frameworks for political objectives, alongside the concept of political autocephalies and the relationship between ecclesiastical and political authority in both countries. The panel will further discuss the role of religious minorities in the conflict and the state’s regulation of religious pluralism in both Russia and Ukraine, examining Eastern Europe as a crossroads of Christian denominations and European conflicts. Public history represents a key analytical dimension: papers will investigate monumentalization, commemorative practices, and artistic production as means through which competing historical memories are constructed, with contemporary art serving as sites for collective trauma processing and contestation of official discourse. The panel aims to trace the historical, religious, political, and cultural dynamics of the conflict, examining their evolution and transformations to illuminate how these historical trajectories inform contemporary hostilities.

### TOWARDS A RETURN OF THE AVANT-GARDE? SOME REMARKS ON RUSSIAN ART TODAY

**SPEAKER:** I. Marchesini (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna)

Taking the essay “Dealing with the Past through Art” (Routledge 2025) as a starting point, the proposed paper focuses on the trajectory Russian art has taken after the events of 24 February 2022. In this respect, the projects developed by the artists Matvei Kaif (b. Matvei Shapiro, 1987) and Elia Vinokurova represent a particular, as well as meaningful, point of view. On the one hand, the value of their work can be appreciated if read against the background of the art created by such conceptualist as Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. On the other hand, though, their poetic and visual grammar display close ties to the Russian avant-garde, hence representing their “return”, a phenomenon recently theorized by Bozovic (2023). Ultimately, this research aims at testing Bozovic’s theory, extending it from the field of poetry to that of art. Arguably, foregrounding the ties these artists entertain with previous artistic experiences opens up a useful window on contemporary developments in Russian culture.

### ORTHODOX IDENTITY TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE PATH TO UKRAINIAN AUTOCEPHALY: FROM SOVIET COLLAPSE TO THE 2022 WAR

**SPEAKER:** M. Napolitano (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)

This paper introduces the key themes addressed in the volume *Religious and Identity-Based Roots of the War in Ukraine* (Routledge 2026) and establishes the conceptual framework for the panel’s broader discussion. It focuses on the transformation of identity models following the outbreak of the war, with particular attention to developments within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, formerly under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, as well as to the reasons behind the shift in the meaning of autocephaly – once understood as ecclesiastical independence and now also linked to political autonomy. The analysis highlights how this transformation was primarily driven by Metropolitan Onufriy’s stance in response to Patriarch Kirill’s close alignment with state power rather than with the faithful. This shift has contributed to a more decisive struggle for Ukrainian self-determination and the rejection of Russian interference. The paper examines how the war in Ukraine extends beyond political and economic motives, constituting a struggle for the appropriation of cultural identity and historical heritage. Central to this analysis is the narrative of the Kyivan Rus’ foundation, which has served as an essential reference point in the strengthening of Russia’s projection of power both domestically and internationally. The paper further explores the characteristics and historical development of the Russkyi Mir (Russian World) concept and its relationship to church-state interaction. Particular attention is devoted to the impact of these dynamics on the path toward Ukrainian autocephaly from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, analyzing Patriarch Kirill’s positioning regarding the war and the religious narratives used to legitimize Russian aggression.

### ORTHODOXY AS BOND AND FAULT LINE IN RUSSO-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS (LATE 17TH–18TH CENTURIES)

**SPEAKER:** A. Bovgyria (Institute of History of Ukraine/ University of Cambridge)

This paper examines Russo-Ukrainian relations from the mid-17th to the late 18th century through the lens of Orthodox identity. It argues that Orthodoxy functioned as a shared framework of legitimation while also generating persistent conflict over authority and belonging. During the Cossack revolution, political claims were articulated in confessional terms: texts speak of “our Ruthenian/Christian people”, ground this community in the “ancient Greek faith”, and place church affairs among the central demands addressed to the Commonwealth. In 1654 appeals to a common faith were instrumental in mobilizing the Muscovite tsar as protector, while the same discourse asserted the antiquity and priority of the Kyivan tradition, traced to Volodymyr’s baptism and to Kyiv as a foundational center of Rus’ Christianity. The paper highlights an asymmetry in this confessional language. Ukrainian actors tended to construct kinship primarily in a vertical relationship with the Orthodox monarch, rather than as horizontal solidarity with a “Russian people”. After 1654, as disputes accumulated over rights, property, and jurisdiction, Orthodoxy increasingly served as a medium for boundary-making. The subordination of the Kyivan metropolitanate intensified this dynamic by converting “protection” into hierarchy. In episodes of open confrontation, confessional rhetoric supported accusations of disloyalty and betrayal within an otherwise shared Orthodox space. The paper therefore explains how a common confession produced both integration and rupture in early modern Russo-Ukrainian relations and shaped later contests over Orthodox unity.

### THE KREMLIN AND THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX IN PUTIN’S RUSSIA

**SPEAKER:** M. Morini (University of Genoa)

On the morning of 24 February 2022, the world awoke to dramatic news – Russia had invaded Ukraine. This caused shockwaves in public opinion and marked a watershed moment, drawing a clear dividing line between 19th-and-20th-century European history. For many, it was unimaginable that Europe could return to a state of war after the conflict in former Yugoslavia. In Europe, nationalism has resurged with unexpected force, posing a threat of destabilization, particularly in countries that still grapple with unresolved ethnic issues or are still consolidating their democratic institutions. Based on these premises, this paper aims to discuss the religious and political origins that have influenced Putin’s Russia in the emergence of the so-called “Putinism” at the domestic and international levels. Doing so, it will be provided an analysis of the relationship between the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church since 1993, trying to underline the main differences between Boris Yeltsin’s approach and Putin’s one. Secondly, it will be described the main political implications for the development of the Russian superpresidentialism in relying on the role played by the Russian patriarch in implementing the Kremlin’s policies. To better understand the interaction between religion and politics in the last years, it will be also taken into consideration the “national question” that has shaped history, tradition, and culture over the centuries, which lies at the core of the contemporary Russian politics.

### THE BYZANTINE LEGACY AND THE CONVERGENCE OF THRONE AND ALTAR: THE RUSSIAN AND SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE “RUSSIAN” AND “SERBIAN” WORLDS

**SPEAKER:** P. Pizzolo (Jagiellonian University)

Since the end of the Cold War, religion has re-emerged as a key instrument in the foreign policies of revisionist states. In some Orthodox contexts, the Byzantine legacy remains tangible in statecraft, where the distinction between church and state often blurs. Following Samuel P. Huntington’s scheme on “civilizational poles”, the paper examines how the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) have contributed to the sacralization of geopolitical projects through the intertwined notions of the Russian World (Russkiy Mir) and the Serbian World (Srpski Svet). It explores how religious narratives and symbols have been mobilized to legitimize external interventions, redefine civilizational boundaries, and sustain national identity discourses. The paper asks how the ROC and SOC frame and justify the political and territorial ambitions of Moscow and Belgrade in theological terms, to what extent they act as autonomous norm entrepreneurs or instruments of state power, and what similarities and divergences mark their use of religion as a foreign policy tool. Methodologically, the analysis combines discourse analysis of ecclesiastical statements and religious diplomacy (2014–2024) with process tracing of church-state interaction, drawing on comparative area studies and literature on religion and soft power. Preliminary findings suggest that both churches contribute to the hybridization of religion and geopolitics, blurring the boundaries between spiritual mission and statecraft. While the ROC operates as a transnational ideological arm of Moscow’s foreign policy, particularly in justifying the war in Ukraine and supporting Russian-led post-Soviet integration, the SOC functions as a semi-autonomous legitimizing force for Belgrade’s regional ambitions in the Western Balkans, specifically in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Together, they reveal how religion can legitimize and advance contemporary geopolitical revisionism.

### DECONSTRUCTING THE “RUSSIAN WORLD”: COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE IN WARTIME DISCOURSE AND VISUAL CULTURE

**SPEAKER:** L. Pidkuimukha (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy)

This paper examines discursive and visual counter-narratives that challenge the ideology of the “Russian World” (Russkiy mir), focusing on its religious dimension and the role of the Russian Orthodox Church. The analysis centers on statements, Twitter posts, and media interviews by Metropolitan Epiphanius, alongside contemporary Ukrainian visual culture, including memes and caricatures. Particular attention is given to how these discursive and multimodal practices expose the ideological foundations of the “Russian World” and critique the political role of the Russian Orthodox Church. Methodologically, the study combines CDA and MDA to examine both verbal and visual representations. In his public statements, Metropolitan Epiphanius consistently frames the “Russian World” as a criminal ideology, often drawing comparisons with Nazism and emphasizing the moral responsibility of religious leaders who legitimize violence. Within this discourse, the ideology promoted by Patriarch Kirill is represented as a heretical ethno-phyletic doctrine that merges nationalism, geopolitics, and religious authority. Such rhetoric discursively reverses Russian propaganda narratives that claim to combat fascism. At the same time, Ukrainian wartime memes and caricatures function as tools of symbolic resistance. Through satire, exaggeration, and symbolic imagery, they portray the “Russian World” as violent and hypocritical, highlighting the perceived complicity of the Russian Orthodox Church in legitimizing aggression and spreading Kremlin narratives. The paper argues that the interaction between religious discourse and participatory digital culture contributes to the deconstruction of imperial narratives and supports broader societal efforts to distance Ukrainian identity from the ideological framework associated with the Russian Orthodox Church.

### RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND PATHS TO PEACE IN EASTERN EUROPE: A LOOK AT THE PAST

**SPEAKER:** M. Garzaniti (University of Florence)

This presentation explores the historical and religious roots of Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on relations between Russia and Ukraine. To understand the current situation and lay the foundations for dialogue, it is necessary to take a long-term perspective. This perspective should consider the complex religious and cultural history of the Eastern Slavic world, which in modern times is deeply intertwined with the development of different national identities. Firstly, it should be remembered that the process of acculturation of the Slavic world to Christianity took place when the traditions of Rome and Constantinople diverged significantly. While Rus’ became part of the Slavic Byzantine world as early as the 10th century, the Tatar invasion of the 13th century caused its fragmentation, favoring different orientations. Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the Ruthenian lands, linked to the Polish-Lithuanian Republica, experienced a cultural and religious renaissance. On the one hand, the Union of Brest (1596) gave rise to an Eastern church united with Rome, while on the other, ecclesiastical figures such as Petro Mohyla renewed Kyiv Orthodoxy under the aegis of Constantinople, integrating scholastic models and contributing to the formation of a Ukrainian cultural identity. With the rise of the Russian Empire, Moscow gained direct control over the metropolis of Kyiv (1686) and initiated a process of centralization and standardization, which tended to suppress local particularities. The tension between the preservation of different cultural and religious traditions and imperial pressures remains underlying in the contemporary era, when the history of the European continent is marked by the development of different national identities. These tensions continue to weigh heavily today, revealing their religious origins.

## TRUTH BEFORE NATION: ORTHODOX DEADLOCKS IN THE UKRAINIAN WAR

**SPEAKER: D. Keramidas**  
(Pontifical University of Saint  
Thomas Aquinas – Angelicum)

The conflict in Ukraine has revealed deep divisions within Orthodoxy. Although there is a strong peace theology grounded in the patristic tradition and church practice, the Orthodox churches have found it difficult to present a clear stance on the war. The main argument of this paper is that this indecision is mainly ecclesiological. Indeed, while the Orthodox magisterium understands peace as a divine gift grounded in reconciliation, the practice of peace within Orthodoxy has often relied on ethno-political narratives. The paper examines how the nationalization of Orthodoxy, through the proliferation of the autocephalic system, has displaced theology as the criterion for Christian witness. This reality has weakened Orthodoxy's witness, as it has justified nationalistic and ethno-religious narratives. Some Orthodox have criticized the persistence of such ideas, such as the Russkyi Mir ideology and other influential ethno-nationalistic convictions across the Orthodox world. Thus, the Ukrainian conflict can serve as a case study of how nationalism (in all its forms) distorts theology. This serves to affirm that inter-Orthodox unity cannot be preserved at the expense of truth, and that achieving unity requires a theological evaluation of Orthodoxy's current administrative structure, particularly the autocephalic system. The paper will use studies by private authors (Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Cyril Hovorun, John Chryssavgis), previous research conducted by the panelist, and Orthodox statements (the Holy and Great Council of Crete [2016]; "For the Life of the World" [2020]; "A Declaration on the 'Russian World' (Russkii Mir Teaching)" [2022]).

## POLITICAL AUTOCEPHALIES (1967–2022): ECCLESIOLOGY, STATE POWER, AND GEOPOLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOXY

**SPEAKER: A. Mainardi (DREST)**

Although rooted in the canonical tradition of the Ecumenical councils, in Christian Orthodoxy autocephaly as a juridical and ecclesiological concept is largely a modern construct, shaped in the 19th century by the rise of national states. Between 1967 and 2022, however, a series of contested autocephalies emerged that cannot be adequately explained within this classical paradigm. Developing in post-imperial, Cold War, and post-Cold War contexts of intensified geopolitical competition, these cases challenged prevailing models of Orthodox unity, raised unresolved questions concerning the authority to grant autocephaly, and exposed the enduring entanglement of ecclesiastical structures with state power. Focusing on the cases of Orthodox Church in America (1970), Orthodox Church of Ukraine (2018–2019), and Macedonian Orthodox Church (1967–2022), this paper analyzes the interplay of ecclesiology, church policy, and geopolitics.

## THE WAR AS A CLASH OF IDENTITY REGIMES: THE ROAD TO THE SECURITIZATION OF IDENTITY IN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

**SPEAKER: M. Puleri (Alma Mater  
Studiorum – University of Bologna)**

In the months following the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, international observers were able to note how in the official state discourses in both Russia and Ukraine the war was predominantly being shaped around identity issues. Adopting a long-term perspective, in this paper we will devote our attention to the development and dynamics of what we will describe as "identity regimes", i.e. a set of narratives and policies promoted and shaped by Russian and Ukrainian officials in post-Soviet times in order to redraw the borders of their respective political communities. As we will see, the case of the war in Ukraine in 2022 shows

how the current collision of the incompatible historical narratives over the attributes of the Ukrainian and Russian political communities has followed a gradual crystallization of their respective narratives in oppositional terms over the last decade. A special focus will be devoted to the dynamics following the start of the war in Donbas in 2014, when the repertoire of categories around language and memory practices in use today eventually came to be shaped along diverging lines. Furthermore, the intersection of official and "unofficial" actors and discourses in structuring the respective identity regimes around the decolonization paradigm in Ukraine and the "restoration of historical Russia" in the Russian Federation in 2014–2022 will be under scrutiny.

## LANGUAGE, RELIGION, AND AGENCY: CHALLENGES OF CRIMEAN TATAR IDENTITY DURING OCCUPATION AND WAR

**SPEAKER: E. Muratova (European  
Centre for Minority Issues)**

The paper examines the situation of preserving the identity of Ukraine's indigenous Muslim minority – the Crimean Tatars – under the conditions of occupation and full-scale war. It focuses on the preservation of the native language and religious traditions and employs a comparative approach to demonstrate the challenges faced by Crimean Tatars both in the occupied territory of Crimea and on mainland Ukraine. The study is based on the results of interviews conducted by the author in the summer of 2024, as well as an analysis of Crimean Tatar groups on the social media platforms Facebook and YouTube. It argues that in both social contexts – Crimea and mainland Ukraine – Crimean Tatars face different identity-related challenges shaped both by differing state approaches toward this indigenous minority and by living conditions. Russian policies of depoliticization and marginalization of Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea have led to a reduction in the spheres of use of the native language and the encouragement of only officially permitted forms of religious practice. Dispersed settlement across mainland Ukraine and wartime conditions create their own difficulties for preserving the native language and religious traditions, influencing transformations in Crimean Tatar identity and strengthening its civic component. Threats of identity loss have prompted a rethinking of victimhood narratives and the concept of "agency" among Crimean Tatars in both Crimea and mainland Ukraine, with distinctive features shaped by the socio-political context in which they live.

## THE KREMLIN AND THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

**SPEAKER: A. Rocucci  
(Roma Tre University)**

The dialectic of the relationship between charisma of power, one of the patriarch and one of the tsar, between that of religious power and that of political power, constitutes a long-standing factor in Russian history. In the 20th century, the vicissitude of relations between the Patriarchate and the Kremlin experienced a dramatic page in its history during the Bolshevik experiment. 1917, the year of revolutions, had marked for the Orthodox Church the beginning of a new era. A deep rupture had occurred. Paradoxically, within the framework of a regime that postulated and pursued the elimination of religion from communist society, with the turn in religious policy desired by Stalin in 1943, the patriarchal institution was accorded a role, albeit within a framework of heavy subjection to political power. The dialectic between the upper echelons of political and religious power was passed on to post-communist Russia to contend with new dynamics. The Orthodox Church's prominence in Russia's public life developed under the sign of a recovered role as guardian of Russian identity and guarantor of the legitimacy of power. Reactions between the Patriarchate and the Kremlin experienced a new season, in which longstanding cultural paradigms, Soviet heritage, ecclesiastical dynamics and political processes were intertwined within the framework of the travails of post-Soviet Russia. ●

P A N E L 1 4

## Politics, Society and Religion in Russia: Transformations since 2022

**PROPOSER: Marianna Napolitano  
(University of Modena and Reggio  
Emilia/FSCIRE) and Kristina Stoeckl  
(LUISS University)**

**CHAIR: Kristina Stoeckl, Marat  
Shterin (King's College London),  
Marianna Napolitano (University of  
Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)**

This panel examines transformations at the intersection of politics, society, and religion in Russia since 2022. Bringing together perspectives from sociology of religion, political science, and intellectual history, the contributions analyze the changing role of religion in legitimizing power, framing social crises, and reconfiguring public discourse under conditions of war and heightened authoritarianism. Several papers revisit the long-standing debate on post-Soviet religious revival, asking whether recent developments mark a qualitatively new "second stage" and how these dynamics should be assessed in relation to secularization theory. Others focus on the Russian Orthodox Church's engagement with demographic decline, civilizational narratives, and paligenetic visions of national survival and rebirth, highlighting how bodies, reproduction, and morality have become central sites of political and religious mobilization. Taken together, the panel sheds light on religion's evolving function as a key symbolic and institutional resource in Russia's wartime society, while also addressing internal tensions, ambiguities, and limits within these processes. This panel is part of the POLISMOD (2026-31, PI Kristina Stoeckl) project launch.

## THE SECOND STAGE OF THE "RELIGIOUS REVIVAL" IN RUSSIA: HOW TO EVALUATE IT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SECULARIZATION DEBATE

**SPEAKER: D. Uzlaner  
(Freie Universität Berlin)**

The presentation examines what the author calls the second stage of religious revival in contemporary Russia. This stage is analyzed at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels; it is characterized by a rapprochement between the church and the state, as well as an increase in the social significance of religion. The author then places his analysis of religious processes in Russia in the context of the secularization debate.

## MECHANISMS OF FEAR AND CONTROL IN RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS LIFE: ORTHODOX CLERGY UNDER REPRESSION

**SPEAKERS: D. Beilinson (OVD-Info);  
K. Rousselet (Sciences Po);  
A. Kordochkin (University  
of Göttingen)**

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian state and parts of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy have sharply intensified surveillance and repression of "disloyal" clergy. Using different methods, these mechanisms create pervasive fear. Our presentation will document how control actually works inside parishes. It will explain some concrete mechanisms through which fear and control are exercised over clergy in today's Russia.

## THE HAGIOPOLITICS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: CANONIZATION OF "PATRIOTIC SAINTS" AND RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

**SPEAKER: S. Shtyrkov (Yerevan  
Center for International Education)**

This paper examines the canonization and veneration of so-called "patriotic saints" (Russian imperial military commanders Fyodor Ushakov and Alexander Suvorov) as a key site where religion and politics intersect in contemporary Russia. While much scholarship treats the fusion of Orthodoxy and state interests as a pathological deviation from a presumed normative separation of these spheres, this paper argues that such an approach obscures how religious nationalism – understood both as a political program and as a logic of social imagination – actually operates in practice. Focusing on concrete practices, particularly projects of canonization, the paper shows that the entanglement of church and state is routine rather than exceptional. Canonization emerges not merely as a theological procedure but as a socially consequential act that redistributes symbolic authority over understandings and public representations of national history, concepts of sacrifice, and moral exemplarity. The analysis highlights the inherent instability of this entanglement. Neither the Russian state nor the Orthodox Church fully control the production of religious-national meaning; instead, it is continually negotiated among diverse actors, including clerics, state officials, intellectuals, military institutions, and lay publics. The figure of the "patriotic saint" exposes the fragility of this synthesis, as efforts to sacralize military service and state-building achievements must reconcile competing regimes of value – ecclesiastical ideals of holiness and humility and secular narratives of national greatness and historical justice. Controversies surrounding such canonizations thus reveal not their success, but the persistent tension and labor involved in sustaining a particular regime of religious nationalism.

## FROM STALIN TO PUTIN: ORTHODOX EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF RUSSIAN PRAVOSLAVIE IN SERVICE OF STATE PROPAGANDA

**SPEAKER: A. Gabunia (KU Leuven)**

This paper examines how Orthodox theology was progressively recontextualized from the Stalin era to the Putin period, functioning as one of the central elements of state propaganda. While conventional analysis emphasizes the political instrumentalization of the Russian Orthodox Church, this study adopts a systematic theological perspective and argues that the transformation is fundamentally epistemological. It examines how theological categories are reconfigured into ideological constructs that sustain the hegemonic language of the Russian state within the ideological doctrine of Russkii Mir. As a result, theology is transformed into a theopolitical discourse that legitimizes state power and presents political claims as expressions of sacred truth. The study demonstrates how the Russian state enforces what is here termed authoritarian perspectivism, a system in which a single ideological viewpoint claims absolute theological certainty and dismisses alternative interpretations as hostile and illegitimate. By interpreting the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine through this closed interpretative framework, the Russian state provides a metaphysical sacralization of political ideologies and actions, making it more complex to challenge them without appearing to challenge the faith itself. The analysis draws on Soviet archival materials together with official publications, particularly the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* and *Bogoslovskie Trudy*. These sources reveal strong rhetorical continuity between the Soviet-era religious discourse and post-Soviet theological language, demonstrating that the religious narrative visible in the war against Ukraine reflects a longer historical trajectory in which Orthodox theology has been repeatedly rearticulated to legitimize state power.

## LAW AND RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA BASED ON THE PRACTICE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**SPEAKER: F. Arkhipov (DREST)**

This dissertation examines the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation on religious freedom, focusing on the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in shaping constitutional interpretation and practice. It analyzes the ROC not merely as an object of regulation but as an active institutional and political actor in state-religion relations. The central research question concerns the extent to which the ROC influences constitutional trends through the Court's decisions. The study combines legal analysis and case studies of key rulings, alongside an examination of state-church interactions. The first part outlines the legal framework governing religious organizations, highlighting unequal treatment of traditional and non-traditional groups. The second part explores the ROC's influence on legislation, judicial interpretation, property rights, and responses to major socio-political events, including the war in Ukraine. The analysis shows that, despite constitutional guarantees of religious equality, the Court's jurisprudence consistently favors the ROC and other "traditional" religions. Minority and non-traditional groups face restrictive registration, limits on missionary activity, and selective use of anti-extremism laws. These inequalities are reframed as constitutional pluralism, producing a hierarchical system in which formal equality conceals substantive disparities. The dissertation's originality lies in its systematic analysis of the Constitutional Court's jurisprudence, a field rarely addressed in Western scholarship. It identifies the legal mechanisms through which constitutional principles are adapted under ROC influence and offers a framework for comparative analysis. The study concludes that the ROC functions as a strategic actor embedded in the legal system, reinforcing a model in which formal secularism coexists with the privileging of a dominant religion, with significant consequences for religious pluralism and minority rights.

## STRATEGIES OF WAR-NAMING AND MORAL MOBILIZATION IN ROC SERMONS SINCE 2022

**SPEAKERS: B. Kress (University of Hildesheim); O. Mennecke (University of Hildesheim)**

In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has contributed to reorganizing public meaning-making under wartime authoritarianism. This paper examines how Patriarch Kirill and Archpriest Andrei Tkachev construct and moralize the category of war in sermons delivered since the beginning of the invasion. We show that war-naming is not merely a matter of lexical choice; rather, it functions as a mechanism of ideological legitimation through which clerics frame the war and shape congregational responses. Drawing on Ideological Discourse Analysis (IDA) combined with a grammatical perspective, we focus on war-categorization and substitution (the noun война and euphemistic alternatives) and modification patterns that stabilize particular moral and political readings. Our findings reveal two divergent mobilizational registers that also expose internal ambiguities within ROC discourse. Patriarch Kirill predominantly relies on oblique framing: he avoids direct references to "war", prefers euphemisms such as "events" or "conflict", displaces "war" onto metaphysical struggle, and redirects responsibility toward Western hostility, thereby softening intra-communal violence while sustaining a "defensive" narrative. By contrast, Archpriest Andrei Tkachev names "war" explicitly from the outset and intensifies it through emotive, World War II-inflected, and apocalyptic frames anchored in biblical references, converting fear into righteous mobilization and actionable anger toward Ukrainians as a constructed enemy-other. By foregrounding the interplay between language, religion, and politics, the paper shows how religious narratives shape social cognition in wartime, when

aligned with state ideology. This perspective also supports more nuanced methodological approaches to linguistic analysis of sermonic discourse, particularly in contexts where religious communication converges with authoritarian legitimation.

## ALEXANDER DUGIN AND THE IMPACT OF HIS IDEAS OF THE "RED" KATECHON AND AN ESCHATOLOGICAL AND ANTI-GLOBALIST SOCIETY ON THE RECENT RESECTULARIZATION OF RUSSIA

**SPEAKER: G. Khislavski (University of Erfurt)**

This paper attempts to determine Alexander Dugin's influence on recent Russian ideology. It focuses on the concept of red Byzantism or red Katechon, which Dugin developed in the early 1990s, initially independently of Carl Schmitt. Its genesis is traced and its structure analyzed. The Katechon concept serves as a glue for connecting disparate ideologemes. Thus, Byzantium, the Third Rome, and the Soviet Union are equivalent elements of an eclectic, quasi-Christian ideological construct in which both Russian leader Putin and Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev) of Moscow feel comfortable. Even the majority of the people of Russia seem to feel comfortable with it. Both are examined in terms of the applicability of Dugin's theoretical framework on the complex empirical evidence in Russia. On the other hand, this well-being as Katechon has a very high potential for hatred, which has been directed against Ukraine and Ukrainians since 2014 and especially since 2022.

## WARTIME PUTINISM: CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND THE CONSTRAINTS ON REGIME IDEOLOGIZATION

**SPEAKER: M. Blackburn (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs)**

Putin's regime is commonly described as a personalist electoral autocracy, in which ideology played a marginal role. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, various indicators suggest a shift toward a more ideological dictatorship. This paper examines evidence for this claim across three domains: (1) the Kremlin's evolving war legitimation script, which downplayed ideological elements and maintained some distance from ultra-hawkish imperial-nationalist groups; (2) the regime's articulation of Russia's long-term future, which remain far less elaborate than the radical Eurasianist, quasi-fascist, traditionalist, or explicitly imperialist visions of rebirth and transformation advanced by thinkers such as Karaganov, Dugin, and Malofeev; (3) foreign policy discourses on Greater Eurasia and the Global majority, which contrast sharply with the regime's actual transactional practices that enable flexible navigation of "global chaos". Drawing on these three strands, the paper argues that ideologization remains fundamentally constrained by both domestic factors (elite politics, state-society relations, and the economic model) and external factors (polycrisis, security competition, the war's trajectory in Ukraine, great-power rivalry, and geo-economic shocks to supply chains). Consequently, Putinism persists as a "thin ideology" lacking a powerful, coherent vision of the future; it is oriented largely toward the present – reacting to events – and refers more frequently to the past than to any golden future. Nonetheless, ambiguity surrounds Putin himself: does he still emulate Peter the Great – a "Westernizer" waging war to secure Russia's place in a concert of great powers – or has he become a genuine champion of Russian Eurasianism? This question reflects historical continuity in Russia's balancing of Western and Eastern orientations. These uncertainties imply that Russia's future path and its relations with America, Europe, and a postwar Ukraine, remain open and contingent.

## THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE "DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS"

**SPEAKER: P. Kolstø (University of Oslo)**

Russian Orthodox leaders and activists have expressed deep alarm over the demographic situation in the country. The paper argues that a major impetus behind the family policy of the Russian Orthodox Church is nationalism, both ethno-nationalism and even more state-focused nationalism, and it analyzes the position of the Russian Orthodox Church and Orthodox believers in relation to these different forms of nationalism over the "demographic crisis".

## CIVILIZATIONISM AND THE BODY POLITIC: ORTHODOXY, SURVIVAL AND REVIVAL IN RUSSIA SINCE 2022

**SPEAKER: B. Kolov (University of Oslo)**

This paper analyzes how, since 2022, Russian Orthodox-inflected civilizations discourse has framed the Russo-Ukrainian War as a moment of spiritual testing and rebirth, through which Russia's historical mission and geopolitical vocation are reaffirmed. It shows how themes of sacrifice, moral purification, and collective endurance recast the national body as both a civilizational and eschatological subject, as well as an object of biopolitical renewal, with demographic reproduction positioned as a measure of civilizational strength rather than a standalone policy concern. The paper argues that this paligenetic imagination integrates eschatology, biopolitics, and geopolitics into a single wartime grammar, in which imperial irredentism, demographic survival, and moral regeneration are articulated as inseparable dimensions of Russia's civilizational destiny. ●

## PANEL 15

## Activate the Sacred through Texts: Translation and Vulgarization

**PROPOSER: Benedetta Manfrinetti (DREST/University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)**

**CHAIR: Carsten Wilke (Central European University)**

The purpose of this panel is to explore how sacred texts are activated through practices of translation, vernacularization, and narrative mediation across different religious and historical contexts. Rather than approaching translation as a merely linguistic operation, the contributions gathered here investigate how textual strategies, material arrangements, and audience-oriented choices enable sacred texts to become meaningful, efficacious, and experientially potent beyond their original linguistic settings. In doing so, the authors contribute to broader discussions on religious experience, textual authority, and the material and intellectual practices through which sacred texts are made present, intelligible, and effective within specific communities. Moving from the late medieval period to the present, and across Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and other religious traditions, the panel aims to question the relationship between sacred language and vernacular expression, questioning the assumption that sacrality is intrinsically tied to a specific language and literary genre. It asks instead if the sacred may be mobilized through storytelling, compilation, layout, paratexts, and modes of address that shape readers' engagement with the text. Translation and vulgarization emerge not only as tools of access, but as prac-

tices that negotiate authority, legitimacy, and the boundaries between ritual use, personal devotion, and cognitive understanding. By foregrounding concrete textual artefacts, the panel investigates how different forms of textual mediation "activate" the sacred in distinct ways: through narrative immersion, pedagogical framing, hermeneutical guidance, or polemical positioning. Particular attention is paid to the intended audiences of these texts and to the ways in which linguistic choices reflect assumptions about who is entitled to interpret, internalize, or experience the sacred.

## THE GARDEN AND TORRENT OF "HEDONE": TRANSLATING PLEASURE FROM THE OLD GOSPEL

**SPEAKER: E. Piergiacomi (Pegaso Telematic University)**

In the Christian tradition, hedonism is often considered a sinful way of life that separates human beings from the love of God, or from contact with divine essence. However, this talk will focus on a different tradition, one that actually tried to defend the perspective that genuinely pleasurable existence is inseparable from Christian beliefs and religion by proposing an "impervious reading" of the Bible. I refer to philosophers such as Augustine of Hippo, Lorenzo Valla, Francesco Filelfo, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Pierre Gassendi, who could be defined as "Christian hedonists" inasmuch as they attempted to show that pleasure is a good that can be obtained by living a religious life. In order to ground their theory, they translated in Latin passages from the Old Gospel that present hedonism in a pious way. In particular, this paper will focus on two case-studies. On the one hand, I will focus on the translation/interpretation of the garden of Eden of the Genesis, as both the foreshadowing of the Christian paradise and a representation of the condition of human beings before their fall from God, or before the sinful corruption. The name of the garden itself is telling: "Eden" comes from the Hebrew term "Hedna", i.e. the word that gave birth to the notion of ἡδονή. Therefore, it will be argued that Christian hedonists read/translated this episode as proof that pleasure is the good, since before their expulsion from Eden Adam and Eve only had pleasurable experiences, including direct contact with divinity. On the other hand, I will reconstruct the exegesis of the Psalms. Christian hedonists sought in this collection of poems the proof that loving God and leading a religious life reward one with a divine pleasurable life. An example is Psalm 36. According to the Latin version, the psalmist prays divinity to inundate him with a torrent of pleasure ("torrens voluptatis").

## WOLF VON ZÜLNHART (CA. 1450–1519) ACTIVATING THE SACRED: NOT THE LANGUAGE BUT THE STORY COUNTS

**SPEAKER: K.J. Schuil (Central European University)**

On 26 March 1495, Wolf von Zülhart departs from Augsburg for his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In his pilgrim account, he offers an engaging narrative for his journey through the Germanic speaking lands, across the Alps to Venice and onward by sea to the Holy Land. The narrative flows naturally, as if the readers were travelling, alongside him, and appears to be largely grounded in his experiences. However, arriving in the Holy Land, the account becomes more compilatory in nature. At this stage, Wolf von Zülhart alternates between passages in Latin and Swabian. Following a traditional view of Latin as sacred language of Western Christianity, it could be argued that the Latin passages represent the sacred text Wolf von Zülhart seeks to activate through his text, while the Swabian ones reflect his personal engagements with the Holy Land. Although this interpretation may contain some truth, this paper argues that the compilatory impression could also have a more practical explanation. These Latin passages were likely copied from Franciscan Holy Land guide(book)s, whereas his own experiences are recorded in Swabian, the language in which he was thinking. Related, it may be suggested that Wolf von Zülhart either lacked the necessary skill,

did not consider himself the appropriate person, or more plausibly, did not have the time to translate these Latin materials in Swabian. This would help to explain the compilatory character of the Holy Land section. However, this does not mean that Wolf von Zühlhart did not attempt to activate the sacred through text. Rather, he employs a form of merging storytelling to do so, one that goes beyond a simple revivification, memorialization or dramatization. In other words, this paper proposes that, in the case of Wolf von Zühlhart, it is not primarily the insertion of Latin as a sacred language that activates the sacred through text but rather the narrative strategy of merging storytelling.

## FROM RECITATION TO COMPREHENSION: ACTIVATING THE QUR'AN IN THE AHMADIYYA ITALIAN TRANSLATION (1986)

**SPEAKER: F. Badini (FSCIRE)**

This paper examines the first Italian translation of the Qur'an produced by the Ahmadiyya and published in London in 1986 by the London Mosque, interpreting it as a device for activating the sacred text rather than as a merely linguistic mediation. Drawing on the analytical distinction between ritual use and cognitive engagement with sacred scripture, the contribution argues that the Ahmadi translation enacts a specific form of activation grounded in understanding, while preserving Arabic as the exclusive language of liturgical recitation. In contrast to earlier Italian translations of the Qur'an, this version explicitly addresses an Italian-speaking Muslim readership, with the aim of making the Qur'anic message intelligible and theologically coherent. Although based on the English translation by Sher Ali, the Italian version situates itself within a longer Ahmadiyya tradition of vernacular translations conceived as instruments of religious education and missionary activity. The analysis focuses on the structure of the volume – comprising a preface, the translation proper, explanations of selected Arabic expressions, and an analytical index – as well as on specific material and textual choices: the Arabic text printed in parallel columns with the Italian translation, the use of simplified Latin-script transcription for key Arabic terms, the thematic subdivision of the sūras, and the non-academic function of the preface. Rather than offering a general introduction to Islam, the preface positions Islam in relation to Christianity and Judaism, emphasizing divine unity and advancing a polemical reinterpretation of Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and divine sonship. Through these elements, the paper shows how the Ahmadiyya translation activates the sacred text not at the ritual level, but at the hermeneutical one, framing comprehension as a legitimate mode of experiencing the sacred.

## THE LIVING VOICES OF THE PALI SUTTAS: DEBORDERING SOUND AND MEANING IN A THAI BUDDHIST MONASTERY

**SPEAKER: M.V. Nenna (Sapienza University of Rome)**

This paper examines how contemporary Buddhist practitioners enact chanting as a creative and embodied practice that unsettles the apparent fixity of the Pali Suttas. Based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Thailand, I explore how chants are not merely recited texts but lived, sensory, and communal events. I argue that chanting bridges the divide between sound and meaning by transforming Pali scriptures into an embodied experience of Dhamma within the everyday practice of Theravāda Bhikkhū. Approaching chants as emergent and intersubjective performances, I show how they are produced through ongoing processes of “debordering” between textual meaning and vocal vibration. Rather than treating chants as fixed scripts, this framework highlights their dynamic reconfiguration in performance, foregrounding the interplay between textual authority and embodied agency. In chanting, practitioners emphasize rhythm, tone, or semantic content depending on context. By impressing their own agency up-

on archaic scriptures through the use of the voice, they perform them according to their own interpretation of what constitutes the significant part of the linguistic sign, depending on the goal at hand: to memorize the teaching, to heal, to meditate, to experience anatta, or simply to feel better. In this sense, chanting does not simply reproduce the Suttas as sacred words attributed to the Buddha; it generates a sensory horizon through which the teachings are interpreted and lived. Chanting thus emerges as a performative practice in which voice and body become central mediators of religious knowledge. For Bhikkhū, recitation is not supplementary to reading but constitutive of understanding: the text acquires substance and feeling through vibration. By moving from written scripture to resonant sound, chanting produces Dhamma as felt presence, an embodied and communal mode of knowing that is continually reanimated in oral and everyday practice.

## THE SPANISH VULGARIZATIONS OF THE SIDDURIM: A SPIRITUAL INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL COHESION

**SPEAKER: B. Manfrinetti (DREST)**

This paper investigates the role of Spanish vernacularizations of Jewish prayer books (siddurim) in the early modern period from a twofold perspective. First, it examines their function as a linguistic vehicle that enabled former conversos – lacking knowledge of Hebrew and wishing to return to Judaism – to understand the meaning of the prayers and to participate more consciously in communal worship conducted in Hebrew. Full comprehension of the liturgical text fostered a deeper spiritual engagement and a renewed relationship with the divine. Building on this premise, the paper hypothesizes the existence – for some prayers – of relatively stable or “standard” translations circulating among Sephardi communities. Such shared versions may have strengthened communal cohesion through familiarity with common liturgical formulas and the perception of a more stable spiritual connection with the divinity. In this context, translation was a practical instrument for reintegrating former conversos into the social and religious fabric of the Sephardi diaspora. This process must be analyzed considering the mobility that characterized these communities, whose rabbis and leading figures frequently moved from one center to another. Secondly, the paper explores the presence of vernacularized prayers in Jewish treatises of the early modern period, with a special focus to works produced in the first half of the 17th century – marked by the increasing of the phenomenon of teshuvah, understood here as a return to Judaism, and by a growing demand for texts facilitating the reintegration of former conversos. The treatise *Thesoro de Preceptos* is a case study for examining the social role of translation in the liturgical sphere. Familiarity with vernacular versions of major prayers may have reinforced not only local communal identity but also bonds among geographically distant Sephardi communities, contributing to the maintenance of a broader “pan-Sephardi” sense of spiritual unity.

## TRANSLATING THE UNKNOWN: A DIVINATORY TEXT IN EARLY MODERN KERALA

**SPEAKER: T.J. Pattery (Central European University)**

*Pālpustakam* (Pāl: from the Persian *fal*, *Lot pustakam*: Malayalam, book – the *Book of Lots*, *Ktaba d-Pal* in Syriac, and *Libro da sortes* in the Portuguese texts) is a divinatory text, originally written in Syriac, which was used among the Saint Thomas Christians in Kerala, India. The earliest extant references to this text in Kerala are from the 16th century. For the divination, the eyes of the one whose fate is scrutinized were banded, and they had to point blindly to one of the 49 numbers, which was supposed to tell his/her fate. The ritual, accompanied by prayers, was administered by the priests. Following the Latinization attempts by the Portuguese in the 16th century, the *Pālpustakam* and the practice of consulting it were repeatedly condemned as heretical. Despite

these prohibitions, the text continued to be copied, translated, and used well into the 20th century. I have identified six copies in Syriac and Malayalam, displaying considerable variations. This paper will explore how this divinatory manual became a medium to access sacred knowledge. The sacred is then activated in these texts first through detailed instructions for the performance of the divination, and through the person of the priest who interprets the divine will for the seeker. The translation of the text from Syriac to Malayalam, which might have happened in the 19th century, shows that, the repeated condemnations notwithstanding, in the popular *imaginaire*, divination continued to be an important part of sacred knowledge entrusted to the priests. However, it was now mediated by the vernacular language. This translation was probably necessitated by the waning influence, indeed knowledge, of Syriac. Drawing on manuscript evidence and letters of prohibitions, this paper will argue that divination was an important part of the everyday religious life and that the priests played the role of diviners, translators, and transmitters of sacred knowledge to the community. ●

## P A N E L 1 6

# Church History and Audiovisual Archives: New Approaches and Studies

**PROPOSER: Federico Ruozi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)**

**CHAIR: Raffaella Perin (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore)**

In recent decades, audiovisual archives – films, television news, documentaries, radio recordings, and, lately, born-digital materials (recent popes, for example, have social media accounts) – have become indispensable sources for the history of the church. These materials not only document events, figures, and ecclesial practices, but also actively contribute to shaping the religious imaginary, forms of ecclesial communication, and the ways in which Catholicism has represented itself in the global public sphere. This open panel seeks to host and present research that proposes a methodological rethinking of the relationship between church history and media, critically interrogating the traditional categories of religious historiography in light of the visual and media cultures of the 20th and 21st centuries. Through case studies ranging from the mediatization of major ecclesial events (councils, jubilees, conclaves, papal journeys) to film and television production, and including presentations of new digital libraries dedicated to collecting audiovisual sources concerning the Italian church, the panel aims to be a space for reflection on how moving images have transformed both the ways of making, narrating, and transmitting church history and the ways of studying it – placing new sources on the historian's workbench. By adopting interdisciplinary approaches that weave together religious history, social and political history, media studies, and cinema and television studies, the panel seeks to bring together scholars that innovatively draw on audiovisual sources for the study of contemporary history. Audiovisual archives are not merely documentary repositories but historical actors that participate in the shaping of contemporary Catholic cultures.

## MEDIATING THE CONCLAVE: RITUAL, POWER, AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

**SPEAKER: F. Ruozi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)**

A two-millennia-old rite that remains the only form of lifetime election of what can fully be considered an absolute authority – one capable of adapting its laws to the changing times and thus ensuring its own survival – the conclave, that is, the election of the pope, was compelled in the 20th century to confront its own mediatization. The paper explores the evolution of the conclave in its media dimension, highlighting how a traditionally secret and ritual event has progressively become a global spectacle through the lenses of audiovisual media and social networks. The habemus papam and the first images of newly elected pontiffs broadcast worldwide have contributed to the construction of an idea of the papacy that cannot be underestimated. From Pius XI and Pius XII through to the conclaves of Francis and Leo XIV, the research here presented try to analyze how the collective imagination has been shaped by transmitted images, journalistic commentary, and the logics of television spectacle, as well as by cinema and television series – thus showing the entry of the conclave into mass culture. In doing so, it sheds light not only on the media effects but also on the ecclesiological repercussions, as well as the political and symbolic transformations that follow from them. It also addresses the risks associated with narrative simplification, the politicization of the conclave, and the spread of fake news.

## REFORMING HOLLYWOOD: THE HOLY SEE AND THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF DECENCY DURING THE PONTIFICATE OF PIUS XII (1939–1958)

**SPEAKER: A. Montanari (UNINETTUNO University)**

Established in 1934 under the aegis of the archbishop of Cincinnati, John T. McNicholas, the National Legion of Decency's primary objective was to monitor the morality of American films and, as far as possible, guide the decisions of producers and directors. Working in tandem with the Production Code Administration, the Legion wielded significant influence until the 1960s. This paper aims to outline new research trajectories regarding the relationship between the Legion and the Holy See, drawing on the documentation that has emerged since the 2020 opening of the Vatican archives for the pontificate of Pius XII. In doing so, it will highlight key turning points, parallels, and conflicts where they arise.

## THE MISSION ON FILM: THE CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE OF THE PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS

**SPEAKER: D. Adreani (Archivio Generale Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere)**

This contribution aims to present the film production activities carried out by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), a missionary institute founded in Milan in 1850 and now active in 19 countries around the world. In the 1950s, the institute decided to promote its activities through audiovisual media. Over the years, the institute increased its film production and distribution, directly involving both professionals in the sector and the missionaries themselves, and subsequently creating a dedicated production, post-production, and distribution center at its Milan headquarters, which remained active until 2004. PIME's audiovisual production is characterized by a great diversity of content and approaches to the audiovisual medium, both in terms of subject matter, linked to the different mission territories and contexts of activity, and in terms of narrative style (documentary, journalistic, film, etc.). This diversity is also reflected in the production media, which include 16, 8 and Super 8 mm film, mag-

netic tape (Betacam, Betamax, VHS, etc.), and digital media. The material, currently stored at the General and Photographic Archive in Milan, has recently been the subject of a reorganization and inventory project with the aim of making it accessible to users once again and enhancing its many potential uses. During the intervention, I will attempt to highlight the similarities and specificities related to PIME's audiovisual production, especially with regard to the broader Catholic and missionary context in Italy in the second half of the 20th century.

## MEDIA, RITUAL, AND POWER: A CENTURY OF JUBILEES IN THE AGE OF MASS COMMUNICATION

**SPEAKER: D.E. Viganò (UNINETTUNO University)**

From the first filmed Jubilee of 1900 to the Jubilee of Mercy, Holy Years progressively became laboratories in which the church confronted and integrated the emerging audiovisual media. The competing cinematic gazes of Lumière and Biograph, the global reach of Vatican Radio under Pius XI, and the early televisual experiments around the 1950 Holy Year marked decisive shifts in papal visibility. Post-conciliar transformations reshaped the tone and narrative of Jubilee coverage, while television enabled unprecedented forms of mediated participation. Under John Paul II, the Jubilee entered a fully global media ecology, merging ritual performance with worldwide spectacle. Across a century, changing media technologies reframed devotional practices, spectatorship, and the public construction of ecclesial authority.

## LITURGY AND MEDIA: THE CONCILIAR REFORM FROM ITS INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TO THE CONTEMPORARY "MASS-MEDIA" PAPACY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

**SPEAKER: M. Proietti (FSCIRE)**

The liturgical reform inaugurated by Vatican II unfolded within an increasingly "mediatic" cultural context. From its earliest implementation, it attracted intense attention from newspapers and television, as demonstrated by the broad circulation of photographs, televised celebrations, and musical recordings. This visibility not only amplified the reform's impact but also contributed to shaping its reception, at times reinforcing critical responses and polarizing interpretations. Less well known is the fact that the archives of the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia* preserve extensive photographic and audiovisual documentation examined by the post-conciliar commission. These materials were used in evaluating concrete liturgical practices and in guiding decisions concerning the revision of specific rites. In the following decades, as television became widespread, the relationship between liturgy and media intensified, reaching a significant stage during the pontificate of John Paul II, particularly in the context of Jubilee celebrations and apostolic journeys. With the rise of social media, especially under Pope Francis, the mass-mediatization of papal liturgy has further expanded, reshaping both the perception of papal celebrations and the collective imagination of the papacy, while also influencing local liturgical practice. ●

P A N E L 1 7

## Women's Pedagogies in the Catholic World between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

**PROPOSER: Federico Ruozi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)**

**CHAIR: Francesca Cadeddu (FSCIRE)**

Catholic women who devoted themselves to education played a crucial role in the cultural, social, and religious formation of generations of children, young people, and adults, making a decisive contribution to the construction of both formal and informal educational systems between the 19th and 20th centuries. This contribution aims to explore the plurality of these experiences – religious women, consecrated laywomen, educators, pedagogues, school principals, and missionaries – highlighting both their agency and the institutional, theological, and gender constraints within which they operated. Drawing on a historical and interdisciplinary approach that combines church history, history of education, gender studies, and cultural studies, the open panel proposes to analyze how these women developed original pedagogical practices, often in critical dialogue with male educational models and with the transformations of modernity. Particular attention will be paid to the religious and civic networks in which they acted, to the educational languages they employed, and to the ways in which their work contributed to redefining the relationship between Catholicism, society, and education.

## MADDALENA MORANO

**SPEAKER: G. Loparco (Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium)**

Maddalena Morano (Chieri, Piedmont, 15 November 1847 – Catania, Sicily, 26 March 1908) was a teacher before joining the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, founded in 1872 by St. John Bosco. In 1881, she was sent to Sicily, a region then perceived as profoundly distant from Piedmont. In a context marked by severe backwardness, particularly with regard to the condition of women in the working classes, Morano was able to adapt the Salesian educational experience to local needs. She founded 19 communities. Overcoming mistrust and prejudice, she promoted female education by opening elementary schools, as well as boarding schools and dormitories, which were essential for overcoming transportation difficulties and allowing students living away from home to attend public schools. This laid the foundations for young women's access to social life and forms of paid work. Festive oratories also played a significant role, offering for the first time, especially to girls, a recognized space for socialization and leisure, with new associations and interests. An educational style based on simplicity and respect and the care taken over the environment contributed to developing in the girls, alongside their education, a growing awareness of themselves, their dignity, and their responsibilities, in contrast to widespread attitudes of fatalism. Between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thousands of young people, not only glimpsed concrete possibilities for change, but became active agents of transformation. Mother Morano, thanks to her strong character and her practical love of education, gave a decisive impetus to the promotion of a female education aimed at forming "good Christians and honest citizens" capable of responding to new needs. At the same time, she contributed to renewing the model of female religious life, stimulating the local clergy in pastoral action and establishing catechism schools, which had been virtually absent until then.

## CATHOLIC SCOUTING, COEDUCATION, AND THE LEGACY OF A SCOUT PEDAGOGY FOR GIRLS (1974–1985)

**SPEAKER: V. Schirripa (LUMSA University)**

The Associazione Guide Italiane (AGI), the Italian Catholic girls' scouting association, was founded in 1943, almost 30 years after its male counterpart, the Associazione Scout Cattolici Italiani (ASCI, 1916). Until 1974 – when the merger with ASCI formed the Associazione Guide e Scout Cattolici Italiani (AGESCI) – AGI remained smaller in membership and, from the 1960s onward, was increasingly defined by a far-reaching reappraisal of the Scout method and of the association's own institutional traditions. This drive was linked both to reflections on "female specificity" within the Scout proposal and to the forms of socio-political engagement adopted by the association. The birth of the new unified association under the banner of coeducation contributed, in some respects, to diluting the most innovative developments that emerged within AGI inside a larger and more complex associative body, cooling the ferment that had animated its leadership in the wake of 1968. While a demographic boom in scouting was closing the quantitative gap between girls and boys, the incorporation of AGI's legacy posed significant methodological and cultural challenges. The paper proposes, as a case study, the process that led to the adoption of two distinct symbolic frameworks for the 8–11 age group. At the end of a decade of experimentation, AGESCI largely confirmed male or mixed packs of *lupetti* (Wolf Cubs), based on Kipling's *Jungle Book*, while preserving all-female *coccinelle* (Ladybirds) circles. This latter option, inherited from AGI, was supported by a handbook titled *Sette punti neri* (Seven black dots), explicitly constructed to mirror the playful experience of the wood environment. This trajectory captures an intense phase of pedagogical debate within Catholic scouting, as the 1970s fostered a fusion of educational work and political commitment, occurring alongside the growth and institutionalization of youth associational life in late 20th-century Italy.

## THE REBIRTH OF MONTESSORI THOUGHT BETWEEN PEDAGOGY, CATHOLICISM, AND CULTURAL RENEWAL: THE CENTRO NASCITA AND ELENA GIANINI BELOTTI IN THE 1960S

**SPEAKER: V. Roghi (LUMSA University)**

The paper will analyze how the work of Elena Gianini Belotti stood at the crossroads of pedagogical renewal, demands for women's emancipation, and Catholic culture, contributing to a recovery of the Montessori method that had largely disappeared from pedagogical debates in the 1950s.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE SPIRITUAL TRAINING OF TEACHERS IN MARIA MONTESSORI: SOME ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

**SPEAKER: D.L. Gabusi (University of Verona)**

This presentation aims to focus on Montessori's approach to religious education, with particular attention to the spiritual formation of teachers ("a synthesis of the scientist and the mystic") and to "educational sins". Drawing on some of Maria Montessori's writings and experiences inspired by the method, the presentation will explore the relationship between the development of a scientific pedagogy on the one hand and the spiritual and religious vision on the other; it will also examine the importance of "means of psychic development" as the basis for inner development and the spiritual growth of the child.

## BARBIANA BEYOND BARBIANA: THE PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF ADELE CORRADI

**SPEAKER: F. Ruozi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia/FSCIRE)**

The contribution examines the figure of Adele Corradi (1924–2024) as a teacher committed to an emancipatory pedagogy developed in the wake of the experience of the Barbiana school and the teaching of Don Lorenzo Milani. Through an analysis of her educational practices, her writings, and the school contexts in which she worked, the paper reconstructs how Corradi translated Milani's principles of educational justice, civic responsibility, and the centrality of the marginalized into concrete pedagogical action. Drawing on archival sources, testimonies, and comparative analysis with other contemporary educational experiences, the paper seeks to reconstruct the still under-studied figure of Adele Corradi and the contribution she made both within Milani's school and, after his death, in public schools in Italy and abroad.

## ANTONIETTA GIACOMELLI: RELIGIOUS RENEWAL AND THE EDUCATION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN

**SPEAKER: F. Cadeddu (FSCIRE)**

Antonietta Giacomelli (1857–1949) was a prominent figure in Italian Catholicism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whose literary and social work originally intertwined religious renewal with the promotion of education for Catholic women. Born into a wealthy family with roots in the Risorgimento and a cultural orientation open to modern demands, her early literary output (mainly educational novels), was intended as a tool for civic as well as religious education: through narratives aimed primarily at young women and adolescents, Giacomelli proposed models of active women, capable of social commitment and independent religious reflection. These works were characterized by a constant pedagogical tension and a desire to promote Christian social commitment attentive to issues such as economic justice and the condition of workers. During his stay in Rome, from 1893 to 1898, Giacomelli came into contact with circles of religious and cultural renewal in the city and contributed to the founding of the Unione per il bene, an association that carried out charitable activities and was characterized by a secular and strictly non-denominational approach. Upon her return to northern Italy, her editorial and pedagogical activity focused on the dissemination of religious texts intended for female audiences, with the aim of bringing religious practice closer to biblical and liturgical sciences. However, these initiatives met with resistance from the ecclesiastical authorities, culminating in the condemnation of the work *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* (a collection of prayers, pious reflections, sacred hymns, and invocations combined with translations of biblical passages) and its inclusion in the Index in 1913, until its subsequent rehabilitation in 1942. This paper aims to present Giacomelli and some of her most significant works, with the goal of outlining the pedagogy she expresses and the role she envisions for Catholic women in the religious and civil life of liberal Italy. ●

## Religion and the Making of (In)Equalities in Africa: Power, Knowledge, Gender and Colonial Legacies

**PROPOSER:** Iliara Macconi (FSCIRE)

**CHAIR:** Xolani Sakuba (University of KwaZulu-Natal), Innocent H. Maganya (IRDIS, Tangaza University)

Religion plays a fundamental role in Africa, shaping social relations, moral orders, identities, and political authority. While it has often served as a powerful resource for empowerment and the pursuit of equality, it has also contributed significantly to the production, legitimation, and persistence of multiple forms of inequality. Adopting a multidisciplinary perspective, this panel examines the ambivalent role of religion – including Christianity, Islam, and African religious traditions – as both a vehicle for emancipation and a mechanism of domination in African contexts, from the colonial period to the digital present.

Drawing on the collaborative experience of a well-established Euro-African network of scholars and on different empirical and theoretical case studies, the panel explores how religious institutions, discourses, and practices intersect with structures of race, gender, slavery, colonial violence, education, and epistemic authority. It seeks to foster dialogue among historians, scholars of religion, theologians, and practitioners working on Africa and the African diaspora.

The panel invites three additional contributions addressing different religious traditions, regions, and historical periods. It particularly welcomes papers that conceptualize religion in Africa as a site of contestation and resistance, as well as inequalities, and that adopt comparative, decolonial, or interdisciplinary approaches. The panel will be organized around four thematic sections: (1) religion and power dynamics (colonial legacies); (2) religion and gender dynamics; (3) religion, knowledge production and epistemic authority; and (4) religion and socio-cultural dynamics.

### FROM COLONIAL POWER TO “INCULTURATION”: THE IDENTITY PROPOSAL OF CATHOLICISM IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

**SPEAKER:** G. Chiarolanza (University of Rome Tor Vergata)

Against the backdrop of decolonization and the waning of European political influence in Africa, the theology of inculturation provided the church with a theoretical framework for redefining its presence in societies that had become independent. This theological current, which proposes a reflection on the criteria for the “incarnation” of the gospel within a culture and on the corresponding integration of that culture into the life of the church, was systematized following Vatican II, when Christianity was recognized as capable of expressing itself beyond European cultural forms. This perspective faced a structural difficulty: for such dialogue to be possible, “culture” had to be clearly identifiable, and therefore unitary. The process of inculturation presupposed, in other words, a reified conception of culture, treating it as an interlocutor with clearly defined boundaries. Where such unity was not immediately apparent – as in contexts characterized by great diversity, for example in the Democratic Republic of Congo – a process of selection and synthesis became necessary. This was, in effect, an operation of cultural construction that consolidated this diversity, transforming it into an identity conceived on a national scale. It was against this backdrop that the Zairian Catholic rite came into being: presented as an expression of Congolese cultural distinctiveness, it appears instead to be the result of a complex process of mediation, in which the diversity of local traditions was synthesized into a single liturgical model. Through this endeavor Catholicism redefined the nature of its presence in the postcolonial world: with political support having waned, the church redefined its power in moral terms, presenting itself as the guardian and guarantor of local cultural identities. It survived no longer as a foreign system imposed from outside, but as an element capable of promoting and protecting indigenous cultures, whilst keeping its universalist claim intact.

### MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA AND SLAVERY IN SÉGOU (FRENCH SUDAN), LATE 19TH–EARLY 20TH CENTURY

**SPEAKER:** M. Rovellini (independent researcher)

In colonial Africa, Christianity promoted by missions often spread among socially subordinated or marginalized groups, including enslaved people. The White Fathers’ mission of Notre-Dame du Ségo, in French Sudan, operated in a context that was deeply shaped by the legacy of the slave trade. The Bamana people of Ségo were active participants in the capture and redistribution of slaves, which constituted a structural aspect of their social and economic organization. During the early years of colonial rule, the French ad-

ministration adopted a relatively tolerant approach towards this institution, delaying its abolition and often relying on it. Within this setting, the relationship between the missionaries of Africa and slavery developed along two distinct levels. Within the mission’s internal discourse, the views of the White Fathers were deeply shaped by the abolitionist commitment of the congregation’s founder, Monsignor Charles Lavigerie, and could at times take a critical stance towards colonial policies. From a practical point of view, however, slavery played a fundamental role in shaping the composition of the Christian community of Ségo, which was largely formed by individuals with backgrounds related to various forms of enslavement or dependency. Thus, the mission emerges as a space where abolitionist ideals and colonial realities converged, and where individuals who had been dissocialized by the slave trade could be resocialized within a Christian framework.

### WHO SPEAKS FOR ISLAM?: MUSLIM WOMEN, DIGITAL MEDIA, AND RELIGIOUS INEQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEAKER:** C. Muslim (University of KwaZulu-Natal)

This paper examines how digital religious spaces have become key arenas for negotiating gender, authority, and inequality within contemporary South African Islam. It focuses on the public backlash directed at the Taking Islam to the People (TIP) committee after their participation in a Muslim community radio discussion on “Can women pray in the mosque?”. The controversy, which unfolded primarily on WhatsApp and Facebook, drew in religious scholars, media affiliates, and lay publics who challenged not only the content of the discussion but also the legitimacy of women’s participation in public theological debate.

Situated within South Africa’s Muslim history of colonialism, apartheid, and diverse Islamic traditions, this case shows how inherited patriarchal hierarchies still shape who is allowed to speak for Islam. Digital platforms may widen participation, but they also reproduce gendered and epistemic inequalities. For Muslim women, online visibility brings both new opportunities and intensified forms of surveillance, moral regulation, and silencing.

The TIP case demonstrates how digital religion is not simply a neutral or democratizing force but a contested field in which struggles over religious authority, gendered piety, and spiritual legitimacy are played out. Online critique operates affectively and relationally, mobilizing shame, credibility, and appeals to orthodoxy to regulate women’s religious voice, even as these same platforms allow alternative interpretations and lived experiences of Islam to circulate in Muslim digital publics.

By foregrounding South African Muslim women’s experiences of plurality, marginalization, and resistance, this paper shows how digital religious publics simultaneously open and constrain possibilities for gendered and epistemic justice, revealing religion as a site where inequalities are continuously produced, challenged, and renegotiated in everyday digital life.

### FOREIGN CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AND THE NARRATIVES OF COLONIAL VIOLENCE IN THE PORTUGUESE EMPIRE IN AFRICA (1961–1975)

**SPEAKER:** J. Lopes Pereira (University of Coimbra/KU Leuven)

The end of World War II coincided with a period of growing consolidation of the dynamics of decolonization in Africa. Thus, by the early 1960s, most European colonial powers had been forced to relinquish colonial control, but Portugal remained as a diehard colonial regime, willing to neutralize or discredit any player it perceived as sympathetic to the decolonization. Foreign missionaries, both Protestant and Catholics, became one of the primary targets of the Portuguese colonial regime. In this presentation, I will analyze the intricate relationship between the missionary activities of foreign missionaries in An-

gola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique and the narratives of colonial violence, from the outbreak of the Portuguese colonial war, in March 1961, to the independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa, in 1974–1975. My discussion will be based on primary archival records available in Portugal, Spain, Italy, and in the United States.

### THE HUMAN, JOHN WESLEY AND THE AFRICAN: A DECOLONIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH WESLEY’S CONSTRUCTION OF “MAN”

**SPEAKER:** L. Matthew (University of KwaZulu-Natal)

Between 2014 and 2016, across several Southern African universities, the Fallist movements (PatriarchyMustFall; FeesMustFall; RhodesMustFall) swept across academic institutions in South Africa. This movement, called not only for free education but also the decolonization of the academy. The call to decolonize has become synonymous with the removal of statues and memorials to colonialism, alongside broader demands to reassess and redefine the ways in which Western epistemological privilege shapes and reproduces unequal social systems of race, gender, and class. This critique is particularly relevant in contexts marked by the enduring legacy of apartheid and institutional inequality, such as South Africa. A decade on, in a world rendered increasingly volatile by these logics of inequality, the cry of the Fallist movement is not only relevant but also urgent.

Christian systematic theology has by enlarge remained untouched by the decolonial movement and has only just begun to wrestle with its own colonial underpinnings. Critical for systematic theology and its complicity in reproducing systems of inequality is the question of the human. Decolonial trajectories problematize Western hegemonic assumptions by asking: whose humanity is considered in constructing the (hu)man? Whose humanity counts as (hu)man enough, as valid, or authoritative enough, so that their (hu)man experience becomes the standard through which knowledge can be constructed?

This paper engages John Wesley’s formulation of the (hu)man within two key aspects of his writings: the *Doctrine of Original Sin and Thoughts upon Slavery*. By situating Wesley within his historical and philosophical contexts, and by drawing on the rich legacy of decolonial thought emerging from Southern Africa, this study seeks to address the question: what might it mean to preach the Wesleyan tradition in Southern Africa today?

### COLONIAL PAST, CHRISTIAN IDENTITIES, AND THE CHALLENGES OF RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH SUDAN

**SPEAKER:** C.C. Umeokoli (KU Leuven)

The contemporary challenges and crises in South Sudan cannot be fully explained without attention to the historical entanglement between the Christian churches, ethnic identities, and socio-political stratifications. While much attention has been given to the positive contribution of Christian churches under the auspices of the South Sudan Council of Churches to maintaining peace and harmony in the country, less attention has been given to their roles in sustaining the social divisions. With a special focus on the three major Christian churches in South Sudan – Catholic, Episcopal (Anglican), and Presbyterian –, this paper analyses how the peculiar identities of these churches sustain social divisions among the people, thereby hampering ongoing reconciliation in the conflicted country. To achieve this, I will first highlight how colonial structures shaped these churches over time and how they intersect with various contemporary ethnic divisions in the country. I will then analyze the Action for Peace, a major reconciliation initiative of the South Sudan Council of Christian Churches, and its implementation by the named churches. This will be followed by delineating the limitations of this process, as a result of distinct Christian identities in the country. Finally, I will highlight how the theological decolonial approaches to reconciliation can offer a pathway to sustainable peace in South Sudan.



## WOMEN'S INVISIBILITY AND SUBORDINATION IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY: THE CASE OF AFRICA

**SPEAKER: V. Mbabazi**  
(Makerere University)

This paper critically examines the phenomenon of women's invisibility and subordination within Islamic and Christian traditions, arguing that female marginalization represents not divine prescription but rather the product of deeply entrenched patriarchal social structures and culturally mediated norms that have historically shaped religious interpretation and practice. The widespread conviction among adherents of both Islam and Christianity that men possess God-given superiority over women is shown to lack a coherent theological foundation when scrutinized against the core teachings of these faith traditions. Instead, patriarchal assumptions have been normalized and legitimized through religious discourse, resulting in the systematic exclusion of women from full participation within religious denominations. Through critical analysis of dominant creation narratives and doctrinal motifs, this paper demonstrates how gender hierarchies have been constructed, theologically justified, and institutionally perpetuated across historical contexts. The paper ultimately calls for a justice-oriented hermeneutical approach, a transformative re-reading of sacred texts that affirms women's agency, recognizes their inherent dignity, and restores their visibility and substantive participation in religious life.

## THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN COLONIAL AFRICA AND THE RISE OF INEQUALITIES

**SPEAKER: M. Moyo**  
(Arrupe Jesuit University)

Christian missionaries have been foundational in the history of education in sub-Saharan Africa. Colonial governments left education exclusively in the hands of missionary agencies, whose desire was to propagate the Christian faith. Mission schools became a barometer of Africa's development or lack of it. In the eyes of European missionaries, the Africans were "savages" to be civilized, "cursed sons of Ham" to be saved, "big children" to be educated. For them, there existed no African culture, no religion, only foolish superstitions and tribal customs. The education remained Christian and colonial in outlook, with little or no room for African traditional religious beliefs and practices. It attempted to wipe out every trace of Africa's indigenous cultural heritage and knowledge systems. The study seeks to highlight the inequalities created by Western missionary education through religious education, which did not take into consideration the context and experience of the African. It also seeks to foreground the necessity for action, reflection, and evaluation to reduce inequalities. The research employs a nationalist historical approach to better understand the political, cultural and institutional practices that impacted the lives of Africans and missionary influence. The study posits that missionary evangelization through religious education and colonial subjugation left a deep trauma in the African soul, leading to the rise of inequalities.

## INTERPRETING AFRICAN RELIGION IN WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP: EPISTEMIC POWER, REPRESENTATION, AND INEQUALITY

**SPEAKER: I.H. Maganya**  
(IRDIS, Tangaza University)

This article critically examines the representation of African religious traditions within Western scholarship, focusing on the production and reproduction of religious and epistemic inequalities. It argues that dominant Western academic frameworks – shaped by colonial histories, Christian normativity, and Enlightenment epistemologies – have systematically mischaracterized African religions as primitive, irrational, or merely cultural rather than fully religious systems. Such representations have not only distorted scholarly understanding but have also contributed to broader hierarchies of religious legitimacy that privilege Western religious forms. Drawing on

postcolonial theory, decolonial thought, and comparative religion, the article traces how classificatory practices, terminological choices, and methodological assumptions have reinforced asymmetrical power relations between Western scholars and African religious knowledge systems. It further highlights emerging corrective approaches, including indigenous epistemologies and decolonial methodologies, that seek to reframe African religion as dynamic, philosophical, and historically grounded. The study concludes by advocating for epistemic justice in the academic study of religion through pluriversal frameworks that recognize African religious traditions as equal participants in global religious discourse.

## FROM BABEL TO JUBILEE: DECONSTRUCTING REFORMED APARTHEID HERMENEUTICS AND REIMAGINING PENTECOSTAL ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEAKER: K.P. Motuku**  
(University of South Africa)

This paper examines the evolving role of Christian theology in South Africa by bridging historical analysis with contemporary socio-political relevance. It begins by analyzing what may be described as the "civil war" of Reformed hermeneutics, an internal conflict within the Reformed tradition over Scripture, human dignity, and social hierarchy. Central to this struggle was Jakob Daniel du Toit (Totius), whose hyper-Calvinist exegesis, grounded in the ordinances of creation and a distorted application of Kuyperian sphere sovereignty, provided the theological rationale that legitimated the apartheid project. Through these interpretive mechanisms, racial segregation was elevated from political ideology to divine mandate. In contrast, the paper highlights the emergence of an internal counter-tradition culminating in the Belhar Confession (1982) and the Kairos Document (1985). These texts articulated a decisive *status confessionis*, asserting that apartheid represented not merely a moral error but a theological heresy that compromised the integrity of Christian faith. Figures such as Frank Chikane translated this critique into ecumenical activism, demonstrating how Pentecostal spirituality aligned with liberation ethics. The paper then turns to the contemporary landscape, marked by the rise of Pentecostalism as South Africa's dominant Christian expression and by South Africa's enduring crises of inequality, landlessness, and political corruption. Drawing on recent Lukan scholarship, the study argues that Luke-Acts offers a socio-economic paradigm that can inform a Pentecostal theology of reconstruction, rooted in Jubilee, communal sharing, and economic justice. By integrating historical critique with constructive theological reflection, the paper proposes a renewed ethical framework through which religion may contribute to addressing South Africa's unresolved structural injustices and strengthening its democratic future.

## BRIDGING THE INEQUALITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA AND EUROPE: A CASE STUDY OF THE VEREAD PROJECT

**SPEAKERS: I. Macconi (FSCIRE); M. Moyo (Arrupe Jesuit University)**

Higher education is key to social mobility, a pathway out of poverty, crucial for economic growth, empowerment and sustainable development in the global South. Inequalities are persistent and rising between Europe and Africa. Overcoming such multidimensional inequalities requires that we reimagine, reinvent, innovate, and strengthen a wide range of factors to promote quality, equity, and efficiency through digital transformation. Digital technologies have transformed our lives, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to an unprecedented increase in the use of digital technologies, which are now a key resource in training and education. The study seeks to highlight the role played by VEREAD (Virtual Exchanges in Religious Euro-African Dialogue) to promote academic collaboration between European and African universities not only through

mobility, but also through joint curriculum design, co-teaching, and virtual exchanges. The research employs the phenomenological scientific theory to better understand human behavior and societal structure that lead to inequalities. Collaboration and partnership through virtual exchanges and intercultural dialogues have become instrumental in bridging the gap between Euro-Africa dialogue despite challenges in digital skills and resource mobilization.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN RELIGION SERVES AS A SOCIETY'S-QUALIFICATIONS-AUTHORITY: A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON RELIGION'S (OFTEN FORGOTTEN) CONTRIBUTION TO THE INVENTION OF INEQUALITY

**SPEAKER: X. Sakuba**  
(University of KwaZulu-Natal)

In this paper I will reflect on how, alongside concepts such as eligibility, legitimacy, authenticity, and truth human beings have always used (and continue to use) religion to invent and reinvent both constructive and unconstructive notions of inequality.

## RELIGION, A CONDUIT OR ACCOMPLICE IN PERPETUATING INEQUALITY, A PARADOX: A CASE STUDY OF SOME RITUAL CEREMONIES IN ZIMBABWE

**SPEAKER: F. Zangairai**  
(Arrupe Jesuit University)

History has witnessed numerous happy and ugly instances in which religion is involved either as victim or perpetrator, vanquished or victor in connection to the principle of inequalities. This paper seeks to explore and ascertain ways in which religion has either promoted inequalities or discouraged the same. The bottom line is religion pays double standards in either ameliorating inequalities of discouraging them altogether. Guided by some specific religious rituals and practices in Zimbabwe the paper intends to investigate and expose how religion is hypocritical and at the same time the voice of the voiceless in confirming the dignity of the marginalized. Hence the paper vehemently maintains that religion is a double-edged sword in so far as the vice of inequalities is concerned. The Zimbabwean case study helps to make a bold statement and provides a way forward.

## TOWARDS A RELIGIO-CULTURAL APPROACH TO WAR, INJUSTICE, AND INEQUALITY AMONG THE BAFUT PEOPLE IN THE ANGLOPHONE NORTHWEST REGION OF CAMEROON

**SPEAKER: E.F. Shu**  
(Cambridge Theological Federation)

The ongoing socio-political unrest in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon has left many communities with extensive violence, injustice, marginalization, and socio-economic inequality, with the Bafut people with no exemption. Over the years, while political, economic, and military actions have often dominated discussions towards peace, there seem to be a limited or insufficient communal involvement towards peace, justice, and equality among the people. This study proposes a religio-cultural approach to contributing to peacebuilding, justice, and social transformation. It seeks to draw from the rich indigenous and cultural values, traditional leadership structures, and religious beliefs (ATR and Christianity) that can contribute to reconciliation. Hinged in the broad fields of African theology, cultural anthropology, and peace studies, this work will employ the qualitative research methodology with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions as methods for gathering data. The study seeks to integrate indigenous peace resources with contemporary peacebuilding strategies to develop a contextual response to the crisis affecting the Bafut people. Such an approach encourages collaboration between churches, traditional authorities, and civil society in building a culture of peace and equitable development. ●

## Towards a Critical Re-Edition of Calvin's Correspondence: The "Epistolae John Calvin" Project and Beyond

**PROPOSER: Gianmarco Braghi**  
(University of Palermo/FSCIRE)  
**CHAIR: Gianmarco Braghi** (University of Palermo/FSCIRE)

This panel introduces "Epistolae John Calvin", an international project launched by the Stichting Calvin's Reforming Correspondence ([calvin-digital.nl](http://calvin-digital.nl)) – in collaboration with the Theologische Universiteit Utrecht, FSCIRE, the Huygens Instituut (KNAW), and Éditions Droz (Geneva) – to deliver a new critical edition of the surviving letters of John Calvin (1509–1564). Approximately 3,200 letters to and from Calvin are extant, in Latin and in French. The project's core aim is to publish, annotate, and historically embed this corpus in hybrid form: as a sequence of printed volumes in the *Ioannis Calvini Opera Omnia denuorecognita* (Droz) – resuming and extending the editorial work that advanced with the publications by Cornelis Augustijn and Frans van Stam – as well as a digital environment designed to support further research. By revisiting the correspondence with contemporary critical standards and by integrating sources and findings that have emerged since the foundational 19th-century editorial enterprises (notably the *Corpus Reformatorum*), "Epistolae John Calvin" treats the reformer's epistolary as a dense documentary interface shedding light on pastoral practice, political theology, ecclesiastical conflict, and transregional information flows (from Geneva to France, the Swiss Confederation, and beyond). This panel invites contributions from Calvin scholars, Reformation historians, and historians of 16th-century Christianity engaging with epistles as sources for social and intellectual history, and the role of communication networks in the learned "republic of letters" in the 16th century. It will also welcome digital humanities papers, tackling specific topics such as editorial challenges (variants, attribution, transmission), the methodological questions raised by hybrid editions, and the opportunities and risks of moving from monumental print editions to hybrid and data-rich critical infrastructures.

## THE ROLE OF EPISTOLARY NETWORKS IN THE FIRST YEARS OF THE SPREAD OF THE GENEVAN REFORMATION IN FRANCE (C. 1555–C. 1562)

**SPEAKER: G. Braghi**  
(University of Palermo/FSCIRE)

Between the sending of the first pastor from Geneva to France (1555) and the beginning of the French wars of religion (1562), the ecclesial life of those congregations that adopted the Reformation in the Genevan fashion was (re)organized around letters, couriers, and information flow, at a time in which exile and persecution increasingly displaced Reformed believers. The "church" became a portable shared experience and a replicable model as it was sustained by epistolary networks connecting individual congregations to trans-local consistories, synods, and refuge hubs. In such a context of hardship, pastors, and colporteurs functioned as human relays who carried not just doctrine and consolation, but also news, printed materials, decisions, and practical coordination. Thus, correspondence between

Geneva and France and between individual congregations increasingly solidified into infrastructure, as pseudonyms, coded instructions, and repeated delivery routes represented both secure channels and, crucially, recognizable signs of fraternity across different regions. As early catechisms, confessions of faith, and church disciplines represented reproducible matrixes for diverse congregations, the embryonic synodal machinery anchored such matrixes within the “living flesh” of the scattered network of the French Reformed churches: yet, correspondence functioned as a granular fuel for governance, solidarity, and a catalyst for religious belonging by providing cohesion and a sense of collaboration for shared aims. This paper aims at analyzing the role of epistolary networks in such crucial and ultimately successful years, by revisiting in particular the polemic against religious dis/simulation in the light of the sustainment of local communities through letters, showing a pragmatic ethics of communication which walked a narrow path between prudence and hypocrisy in hopes that conditions would one day allow for the emergence of the French Reformed church into public life.

### MARKERS OF THE EVOLUTION OF CALVIN'S ECCLESIOLOGY IN HIS STRASBOURG PERIOD (1538–1541)

**SPEAKER: M. Baretta (DREST)**

Between the first edition of the *Institutio Christianae Religionis* in 1536 and the end of his stay in Strasbourg in 1541, Calvin's ecclesiological thought underwent a radical transformation. In 1536, Calvin still articulated an understanding of the church that, while sharply critical of Roman abuses, sought to recover the original ancient Catholic roots in an attempt to define a new identity, in search of a middle way that could simultaneously be authoritative and well-founded, in contrast both to the corruption of the Roman Church and to Anabaptist-leaning ecclesiologies. Calvin's exile to Strasbourg in 1538 profoundly altered this framework. Strasbourg confronted Calvin with the different urban, ecclesial, and political environment of a city that was being shaped decisively by the reforming activity of Martin Bucer, who welcomed the exiled Calvin, arranged for him to serve as a pastor of the French congregation, appointed him as a lecturer in the academy, and paved the way for him to meet Lutheran princes and theologians and to participate in the religious colloquies in Germany. From an ecclesiological perspective, this transitional period marked the development of a fully articulated “Reformed ecclesiology”. The relationship between Calvin and Bucer has led some scholars to attribute his post-Strasbourg development largely to Bucer's influence. While acknowledging Bucer's shadow in the evolution of Calvin's ecclesiological thought, this paper aims at showing that Calvin's early ecclesiological architecture should also be understood as his own original response to the Roman Church, the growth of the French Reformation, and the alarming spread of Anabaptist ecclesi-



Anonymous portrait of John Calvin, 16th century [Public Domain]

ologies. Against this backdrop, his epistles and his work on the Commentary on Romans are crucial elements to distinguishing what is uniquely “Calvinian” in his ecclesiology and what is more indebted to other sources, including Bucer, identifying its precise contours and manifestations.

### IMPROVISED READING: BIBLICAL EXEGESIS AND PASTORAL PRACTICE IN CALVIN'S LETTERS

**SPEAKER: K. Woo (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary)**

Scholars have illumined ways in which John Calvin's exegesis reflects his and others' lived experiences, even resulting in distinctive contributions to the history of biblical interpretation. One example is the convergence of early modern religious persecution, migration, and political exile, which appears in ways both expected and counterintuitive. Calvin's sermons, lectures, and (less frequently) biblical commentaries name such external circumstances. Yet these occasional references are frequently oblique, leaving an imprecise picture of the interplay between Calvin's contexts and exegesis. The reformer's correspondence offers another important source for exploring this connection between exegesis and social realities. This paper examines the relationship between Calvin's biblical exegesis and pastoral approach in letters to individuals facing diverse situations throughout the 1540s and 1550s, demonstrating the mutually informing nature of these practices. Calvin did not simply reproduce teaching in his letters; they could also serve as spaces of innovation through improvisation, with concrete circumstances inviting ways of thinking about biblical texts that would only later emerge in Calvin's public teaching and preaching. The materials currently being edited and digitized for access through the “Epistolae John Calvin” project will be an important asset for advancing research into the formative loci and activities of Calvin's biblical exegesis.

### MAPPING A REFORMED “REPUBLIC OF LETTERS”: CALVIN'S INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

**SPEAKER: J. Klok (Theological University Utrecht)**

This paper examines the international scope and significance of John Calvin's correspondence within the broader framework of the ongoing project to produce a new critical edition of his letters. For the first time in the history of Calvin studies, this editorial initiative has generated a comprehensive digital database of all the letters written by and addressed to Calvin. This systematically structured corpus provides a basis for quantitative and qualitative analysis of his epistolary network. Building on this newly available data, the present contribution investigates the geographical range, interlocutors, and thematic diversity of Calvin's correspondence, highlighting its fundamentally transnational character. The study first offers a synthetic overview of the database, mapping the principal regions, confessional communities, and social milieus represented in Calvin's letter exchanges. Particular attention is paid to patterns of communication that reveal the extent to which Geneva functioned as a nodal point in a wider Reformed and European intellectual network. In a second step, the paper turns to a close reading of selected letters that are especially illustrative of Calvin's international interests and engagement. These case studies demonstrate how his correspondence served not only theological and pastoral purposes but also diplomatic, political, and cultural functions. By combining large-scale data analysis with targeted textual interpretation, the article argues that Calvin's letter-writing was central to the formation of an early modern transconfessional and transregional Reformed world. ●

## Women and Agency in Late Antiquity, from Septuagint to Christianity and Beyond: Theoretical Approaches and Case Studies

**PROPOSER: Fabio Caruso (Loyola University Chicago); Laura Carnevale (University of Bari Aldo Moro)**

**CHAIR: Fabio Caruso (Loyola University Chicago); Laura Carnevale (University of Bari Aldo Moro)**

Agency can be considered as the ability of individuals or social groups to act intentionally, make choices and influence social reality, even within structural constraints such as norms, institutions, roles and inequalities. Women's agency in late antiquity has become a key analytical category for reassessing social, religious, and cultural dynamics between the Hellenistic Jewish world and early Christianity. Rather than equating agency with overt power or modern notions of autonomy, recent scholarship emphasizes context-sensitive forms of action, negotiation, and influence exercised by women. Drawing on different types of sources, the panel is divided into two sections. The first one covers examples of women's agency and gendered authority in the Septuagint, and their reception in late antiquity. The second one focuses on women's social and religious agency in early Christianity, through the examination of diverse ritual, literary, social, and historical settings. In both cases theoretical approaches to women agency and case studies – ranging from biblical women and prophetic figures to prophetesses, ascetics, patrons, and anonymous actors – demonstrate how women could participate meaningfully in religious life, shape communal identities, and transmit traditions.

### WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY: A METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

**SPEAKER: F. Caruso (Loyola University Chicago)**

The main purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical analysis of the relationship between women and education in the early centuries of Christianity, using a methodological approach that takes into account the complexity of the sources and historical contexts. The aim is to explore the conceptual categories through which this relationship has been interpreted by modern historiography, highlighting its limits and potential. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives that combine gender studies, cultural history, and educational theory, this work reflects on the concepts of education, learning/teaching, and transmission of knowledge in late antique Christian contexts. The paper focuses on the ways in which knowledge was passed on and the role played by women within Christian communities, particularly in the 3rd and 4th centuries, both as recipients and as active agents in educational processes. It also examines the intricate and sometimes complex relationships between educational models inherited from the Greco-Roman world and the formative and educational practices promoted by Christianity. In this way, the paper aims to offer useful theoretical tools for a more accurate reconstruction of the role of women in the intellectual formation of early Christianity.

## BEYOND THE AVENTINE FEMALE AGENCY AND RELIGIOUS EMPOWERMENT OF JEROME'S FEMALE CORRESPONDENTS

**SPEAKER: G. Marolla (Pegaso Telematic University)**

Jerome's circle of female addressees extends all over the empire: aside from the “Aventine circle”, his letters are sent to women living in Gaul, Spain, Africa, and Constantinople. This paper will offer an overview of such a network and of the literacy of Jerome's female interlocutors, which, as he explicitly says in his preface to his Commentary on Zephaniah, he prefers to men in discussing religious life and exegesis. Being empowered by an unprecedented independence, Jerome's female correspondents travel unchaperoned to the Holy Land, personally oversee their finances, and spend their families' fortunes on the creation of “strongholds of asceticism” to the discomfort of the Roman senatorial elite, as is evident when leafing through contemporary legislation. Further, this paper will also discuss Ep. 46 as an example of a first-hand witness to the female agency of Jerome's closest associates. This letter is the only text penned by women transmitted in the collection, at least if one trusts the paratext, which reads, with minor variants in the manuscript tradition: *Paulae et Eustochiae exhortatoria ad Marcellam de locis sanctis*. Despite its heading attributing the letter to Paula and Eustochium and the potential interest this text may have attracted, the letter was given little to no attention by scholarship until recently, having been repeatedly deemed to have been written by Jerome, in the guise of the two women.

### WHEN VIRTUE BECOMES A NAME: ΘΕΟΣΕΒΙΑ AND WOMEN'S AGENCY IN GREEK INSCRIPTIONS

**SPEAKER: E. De Doncker (KU Leuven)**

This paper examines how the Greek terms θεοσεβεια and θεοσεβής functioned from an early period as evaluative categories for female religious agency in the eastern Mediterranean. While often treated as abstract markers of “piety”, these terms emerge in literary, epigraphic, and Christian contexts as publicly legible, socially consequential descriptors, applied to women as actors, patrons, commemorators, and moral exemplars. Moreover, while the θεοσεβ- word group is well attested in broader Greek literature as denoting practical, visible reverence toward the divine, its onomastic use has received comparatively little attention. By focusing on Theosebeia as a female personal name, this study explores how piety moves from an ethical quality to an embodied social identity; a marker of female (religious) agency. Building on the semantic development of the θεοσεβ- word group in Greek literature and Jewish-Greek texts, the paper turns to inscriptions from late antiquity in which women are explicitly named and praised through this vocabulary. Funerary and dedicatory inscriptions present women not only as recipients of remembrance but as agents of commemoration and devotion, whose θεοσεβεια is materially inscribed and socially acknowledged (e.g. ICG 241; ICG 507; ICG 1576). The recurrence of Theosebeia as a female name, alongside the adjectival attribution θεοσεβής, shows how piety itself could be embodied, named, and gendered without being confined to domestic or silent roles. Read alongside 1 Timothy 2:10, where women who “profess θεοσεβεια” are expected to demonstrate it through visible deeds, these inscriptions illuminate a shared moral grammar in which female religiosity is performative, public, and evaluative. Rather than signaling marginality or submission, θεοσεβεια and θεοσεβής articulate a mode of religious authority, allowing women to claim visibility and agency within their communities.

## AID, HELPER, OR HANDMAIDEN? TRACING THE SHIFTING ROLE OF EVE FROM GENESIS TO THE CHURCH FATHERS

**SPEAKER: A. Bellantuono**  
(Université Catholique de Lille)

In Genesis 2:18–25, the first female figure of the Old Testament, Eve, is introduced. This pericope has been extensively interpreted from an exegetical perspective and, in some cases, has been invoked to justify the subordination of women to men. My research begins with an analysis of Genesis 2:20, where Eve is described as βοηθός ὁμοίος αὐτῷ, “helper corresponding to him” or “an aid equal to him”. This expression carries no inherent moral hierarchy; rather, it is employed elsewhere in the Bible to elevate the status of women (e.g., Tobit 8:6; Sirach 25:24). By contrast, in the New Testament and among the church Fathers, the term βοηθός when applied to women acquires often a pejorative nuance. The female figure is construed as “a helper” subordinated to man. The aim of this article is to trace the socio-cultural factors that contributed to this semantic shift, beginning with a comparison of conceptions of womanhood in Semitic and Greek cultures.

## BETWEEN FAMILY AND STATE: BIBLICAL AND PATRISTIC MOTIFS IN JEAN BODIN

**SPEAKER: D. Dainese**  
(Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna/FSCIRE)

This paper focuses on certain historical-exegetical features of Jean Bodin’s treatment of the family. In particular, it seeks to provide a contextualization of Bodin’s patriarchal proposal, highlighting the centrality of specific historical issues related to a legal doctrine of marital consent.

## THE PROPHETIC SELF/ INDIVIDUALITY IN LIGHT OF (AND BEYOND) MAX WEBER: THE JEWISH PROPHETIC SELF AND JOHN’S POLEMICAL REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE PROPHECY IN REV 2:20–24

**SPEAKER: L. Arcari**  
(University of Naples Federico II)

This paper seeks to explore the concept of the prophetic-visionary self and/or individuality by focusing on the figure of Jezebel in Revelation 2:20–24. In the message addressed to the community of Thyatira, Jezebel appears as a female agent whose prophetic teaching and authority are sharply contested and condemned. Although she is presented polemically, her presence functions as a crucial site for negotiating the legitimacy, boundaries, and social control of prophetic charisma within early Christian urban groups. In Weberian terms, the conflict staged in this passage can be read as a struggle over prophetic authority and its ethical and collective regulation, rather than as the expression of a stabilized institutional order. This framework raises critical questions about the construction of prophetic individuality in a negative or antagonistic key: how is the prophetic self-imagined when it is delegitimized rather than authorized? Which cultural, symbolic, and gendered models inform the representation of Jezebel’s prophetic agency? To what extent does this figure reflect broader Jewish and early Christian debates about prophetic (or visionary) authority and the management of “charismatic” power? These questions extend beyond Weber’s original typology, inviting a reassessment of how ancient religious cultures articulated forms of selfhood and individuality through polemical figures and conflictual discourses. Recent developments in anthropological theory and the historical study of the self provide the meth-

odological tools to analyze Jezebel not merely as a heresiological stereotype, but as a meaningful construct through which early Christian groups negotiated the limits of prophecy, embodiment, and religious authority.

## PROSTITUTES, PROPHETS, PRIESTS: SOME CASES OF WOMAN POWER IN AND OUTSIDE THE EARLY CHURCH

**SPEAKER: E. Lupieri**  
(Loyola University Chicago)

This contribution analyzes two different early testimonies on the power of women in the first centuries in early Christianity. In the first section, the author discusses how Luke applies priestly attributes to the prophetess Anna to extol her, while Revelation connects priestly attributes with female prostitution and pseudo-prophecy to describe the degeneration of John’s adversaries, Jewish (or Jewish-Christian) authorities. In the second section he studies the case of women concelebrating Gnostic eucharist and prophesying in the church of Marcus “the Magician”, as told by Irenaeus. He finally hypothesizes that the fear of women priests in orthodox confessions is connected with ritualized sexual activities that, according to the heresiologists, were constitutive of the religious life of minority groups.

## A MOSAIC PORTRAIT OF JUDITH FROM THE VETUS LATINA FRAGMENTS

**SPEAKER: L. Bigoni**  
(University of Fribourg)

This paper presents an analysis of the characterization of Judith in the Latin translations of the Greek book. It considers semantic shifts and vocabulary variations between the fragments of the Vetus Lati-

na (published by Pierre-Maurice Bogaert and Jean-Claude Haelewyck in fascicles between 2019 and 2020 with Herder) and the Vulgate. The analysis aims at highlighting the role of the indirect tradition of early Christian exegetes in Latin, whose intertextual references to the book can shed light on the state of the biblical textual tradition at their time. The work on the lexical choices of these exegetes as testimonies represented by the apparatus of Herder’s Vetus Latina gives a vivid portrait of the Jewish heroine, signaling her long-lasting and multifaceted legacy in Christian writers between the 4th and the 5th century.

## MARY OF CASSOBOLA, A WOMAN IN TWO EPISTLES OF THE PS-IGNATIAN CORPUS: AN EXEMPLARY CASE OF “GENDERED” AUTHORITATIVE MODEL

**SPEAKER: L. Carnevale**  
(University of Bari Aldo Moro)

The paper focuses on two letters belonging to the “longer recension” of the corpus attributed to the bishop Ignatius of Antioch: the first letter is (allegedly) authored by a woman, Mary of Cassobola, and the second one is the response attributed to Ignatius. They were probably crafted by a 4th-century forger, who had the intention of portraying Mary as a woman with authority, inasmuch she strongly advises Ignatius to acknowledge two young men, respectively as a bishop and a priest of two cities near Antioch. My paper will show how these letters convey an extraordinary “gendered” authoritative model, set in the 2nd century, for women dwelling in Asia Minor two centuries later: women’s agency can include the management of issues related with ecclesiastical hierarchy, and a high degree of biblical knowledge. ●

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A. Melloni, F. Ruozi (eds.), *Episcopal Elections in the Churches: Laws, Practices, Doctrines*, 2025.

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V. Marchetto, *Uno, molti, tutti. Gv 17,21 e la sua ricezione nella letteratura cristiana antica*, 2024.

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### GREAT WORKS

C. Bianchi, A. Melloni, M. Proietti (eds.), *Il concilio e il Credo, 325–2025. Storia e trasmissione dei simboli di Nicea e Costantinopoli*, EDB, Bologna 2025.

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