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# Contexts, Sources and Critical-Historical Methods for the Research of Religion

Online Specialization Course organized by  
Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose (FSCIRE, Bologna/Palermo)  
Tangaza University (TU, Nairobi)  
Kenyatta University (KU, Nairobi)

## 1. General information

**Dates:** every Wednesday, from January 14 to April 15, 2026.

**Time:** 2:30-4:15 EAT/12.30-2.15 CET (for CET only: the last three sessions will be at 1.30 due to daylight saving time)

**Modality:** Virtual Exchange

**Zoom link:** to be provided before the beginning of the course

**Contact person for non-TU and non-KU participants:** Francesco Cargnelutti, [cargnelutti@fscire.it](mailto:cargnelutti@fscire.it)

**Deadline for registration:** January 12th

## 2. Purpose

The course aims at offering advanced students the necessary tools and methodology to approach the study of religion from a historical-critical perspective, focusing on the African context, and on different religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religions). Specific relevant subjects and case studies will be analyzed in depth and from a comparative point of view (African-European).



### 3. Course structure

The specialization course comprises 3 modules, each dealing with an overarching topic. In each module different lecturers will analyze a specific subject/case study, its research methods, the main historiographical perspectives as well as the primary sources. Lecturers will provide reading material and bibliographical suggestions to help students contextualize (and better understand) the analyzed topic. Where possible, lecturers will also present on-line research tools and digital archives resources. A Virtual Exchange Activity guided by trained facilitators from the co-designing institutions will take place in each module and it is an integral part of the seminar. Students will be divided in small transnational groups and will engage in the exercise planned for the session (analysis of a source or reading, debate). They will then exchange the results of their analysis/discussion in the plenary with their colleagues.

### 4. Expected learning outcomes

- Participants will become familiar with the main methodological steps to study religion from a critical-historical point of view;
- They will thus be able to identify the main tools and resources of academic research, to identify the relevant literature for their research topic, to access and analyze a variety of different sources (both written and oral), and to write their own essays and long papers;
- To strengthen this methodological training, students will also acquire a general knowledge of the main historiographical theories and theoretical framework;
- Finally, thanks to the different Virtual Exchanges activities implemented, students will enhance their critical thinking, acquire strong intercultural communication skills and improve their self-confidence.

**Credits:** Each institution will decide according to its program/syllabus. FSCIRE will give a certificate of attendance to all students attending at least 70% of the program (lectures and VE activities).

**Evaluation:** Each institution will decide according to its program/syllabus.

### 5. Modules and VE activities

#### Module 1: Methodological introduction: Sources and Historiographies

##### *Session 1 – January 16, 2026*

**Part 1:** *Introduction to the Specialization Course and to VEREAD* (explanation of Virtual Exchange Activities, etc.);

**Part 2:** *History and Religion: Definition and Critical Issues* – Prof. Reginald Cruz (TU/CHD) and Dr. Ilaria Macconi (FSCIRE).

##### *Session 2 – January 21, 2026 prof. Silvia Cristofori*

**Part 1:** *The “Historian’s Craft” and Its Critical Thinking Skills as Tools for Citizenship: Contextualising, Analysing, and Interpreting Primary and Secondary Sources*

Prof. Silvia Cristofori (FSCIRE, UNILINK)

**Part 2:** VE activity – hands on practice/exercise

### *Session 3 – January 28, 2026*

*Alternative Sources for the Study of Religion: Oral History and Narrative Interviews* – Dr. Ilaria Macconi Heckner (FSCIRE)

### *Session 4 – February 4, 2026*

*Sources for the Study of African Christian History* – Dr. Reginald Cruz (TU/CHD).

### *Session 5 – February 11, 2026*

*Contemporary Historiography on Islam: Methodological Trajectories* – Dr. Francesco Cargnelutti (FSCIRE)

## **Module 2: Christian History and Historiography – Case Studies**

### *Session 6 – February 18, 2026*

*Part 1: The Council of Nicaea in the Historiographical Discussion* – Dr. Costanza Bianchi (FSCIRE)

*Part 2: VE activity: debate on Nicea's significance 1700 years after*

### *Session 7 – March 4, 2026*

*Vatican II: History, Debates, Challenges* – Prof. Alberto Melloni (UNIMORE, FSCIRE)

### *Session 8 – march 11, 2026*

*African Instituted Churches* – Prof. Philomena Mwaura (KU).

### *Session 9 – March 18, 2026*

*The Contribution of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians to the Study of Religion in Africa* – Prof. Philomena Mwaura (KU).

## **Module 3: Christianity in the encounter with African Religion, Islam and actual issues**

### *Session 10 – March 25, 2026*

*New Religious Movements and Cultural Issues in Africa* – Dr. Zacharia Samita (KU)

### *Session 11 – April 1, 2026*

*Christianity and African Traditional Religion: "Anatomy of an Encounter"* – Dr. Zacharia Samita (KU)

### *Session 12 – April 8, 2026*

*Christianity in Dialogue with Islam* – Dr. Felix Phiri (TU/IRDIS)

### *Session 13 – April 15, 2026*

*Virtual Exchange Activity: take aways and students' feedback*



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