

# Religions 360°

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## INDIVIDUAL PAPERS: FULL LIST OF ABSTRACTS

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 2: Elsa Correia Pereira** – University of Porto

*Epistemologies in Contact: Feminist Theory, Lived Religion, and Theological Knowledge in Researching Evangelical Women in Europe*

The academic study of religion has largely been shaped by secular epistemologies, often casting theological knowledge as non-academic and assuming feminist theory to be inherently oppositional to conservative religious environments. This paper argues instead for a 360° analytical approach, building epistemic bridges between feminist methodologies and lived religious epistemologies. Drawing from standpoint theory, decolonial feminist epistemologies, and feminist theology, it proposes a framework attentive to feminist epistemologies and the epistemic agency of religious women, particularly those navigating structures commonly perceived as patriarchal. Using qualitative data from a doctoral study on evangelical free churches in Europe (Portugal, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Bulgaria), based on 50 in-depth interviews and grounded-theory analysis, the paper examines how women negotiate belonging, authority, and spiritual legitimacy. Many of these communities operate as "peripheral sociability spaces" offering recognition and agency to women who feel marginalised in accelerated secular societies. Findings show that religious women often enact "quiet transformation" practices rather than confrontational activism, demonstrating that integrating theology as lived knowledge in feminist sociology of religion expands our understanding of agency. In an era of epistemic fragmentation and AI-accelerated knowledge production, the paper argues that methodological bridge-building in the study of evangelicalism strengthens both the analytical legitimacy and social relevance of religious studies. Feminist theory and religious epistemologies, rather than being mutually exclusive, can co-produce deeper insight into contemporary faith, gender, and power.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 4: Jongmyung Kim** – Geumgang University

*The Dawn Buddhist Ritual in Contemporary Korea: An Exploration of Its Ideological Foundations and Implications*

This study explores the underlying ideologies and philosophical implications of the "Dawn Buddhist Ritual" (saebŏk yebul) performed by Zen monks of the Chogyŏ Order of Korean Buddhism. Rituals are central to human life and form the foundation of many religious practices. As Buddhism spread beyond India, it developed diverse ritual forms shaped by distinct historical and cultural contexts. Yet, despite their significance, Buddhist rituals remain underexplored in global scholarship. In particular, the relationship between Korean Zen Buddhism and ritual practice has received little attention. Compared

with China and Japan, Korea has maintained Buddhist ritual practices with greater continuity, especially daily rituals that are fundamental in both frequency and significance. Although daily ritual practices are often regarded as peripheral in contemporary Korean Zen communities, monastics continue to engage deeply with them. Previous research, however, has largely overlooked these everyday practices and their philosophical foundations. This study fills that gap by analyzing the Dawn Buddhist Ritual at T'ongdo Monastery, one of Korea's Three Jewel Monasteries. It examines key components, including taking refuge in the Three Jewels, aspirational chants, mantras, and the recitation of the Thousand-Hand Sūtra and the Heart Sūtra. Through a hermeneutic analysis of texts and field observations, the study interprets the ritual's central ideas, such as mercy and emptiness, while revealing its integration of esoteric elements, Pure Land thought, and Zen philosophy. Ultimately, this research contributes to the understanding of how Korean Buddhism interweaves ritual, philosophy, and lived experience, offering new insights into East Asian Buddhist practice.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 9: Maria Rogińska** – University of the National Education Commission (UKEN), Kraków

*Memory, Materiality, and Religious Imagination in Anglican Parishes*

This paper examines how contemporary Anglican communities construct knowledge about the foundational period of their parishes, also marked by the violent destruction of medieval material religious culture during episodes of iconoclasm. It is based on a sociological analysis of parish guidebooks and historical leaflets from sixty churches dating back to the sixteenth century across fourteen English counties. These vernacular historiographies reveal a patterned memory of iconoclasm in which destruction, survival, and Catholic materiality are re-narrated through the imaginative work of present-day congregations. Rather than treating iconoclasm as a merely historical episode, the paper approaches it as a generative field of contemporary imaginaries and examines how these imaginaries inform local understandings of identity and belief. Building on debates in memory studies and material religion, the study argues that religious belief is inseparable from religious and historical imagination, and that both are grounded in everyday material practices of religious life. In doing so, the paper demonstrates how the study of religions can illuminate the ways in which imagination and memory are constitutive elements of religious life and offer new avenues for reflection upon it.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 13: Jose Ramón Rodríguez Lago** – University of Vigo

*Working for Peace. The Transnational Networks of Pax Romana (1921-1948)*

The International Union of Catholic Students, founded in the summer of 1921 in Fribourg (Switzerland) and soon known as *Pax Romana*, forged active transnational networks in the following decades, first in Europe and soon in America. Analysis of the documentation now available in the Vatican Archives and various collections in archives in Switzerland, the United States, France, Spain, Chile and Mexico allows us to study the progress of Catholic internationalism on both continents between the interwar period and the beginning of the Cold War.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 14: Satoko Fujiwara** – University of Tokyo

*What Is Meant by "Indigenous Epistemologies"?: Epistemic Pluralism, Writing Styles, and the Study of Religion*

Recent decolonial discussions in the HSS increasingly invoke "indigenous epistemologies" as a key term for challenging the presumed universality of modern Western knowledge. In the study of religion, however, the term is often used either as a broad umbrella concept without analytical precision or is implicitly associated with "animistic" traditions. This risks obscuring the fact that debates over epistemological plurality are not limited to non-European contexts, nor are they purely epistemological in nature. This paper approaches "indigenous epistemologies" as a diagnostic concept and examines how epistemological, ethical, and practical concerns become conflated in contemporary discussions within

the study of religion itself. It situates these debates alongside long-standing—and still contested—discussions about differences in academic writing and research styles, such as those between Anglophone and Francophone traditions, as well as arguments that the growing dominance of English in academic publishing since the late twentieth century has favored narrowly framed, inductive, and empirically oriented forms of argumentation. Drawing on observable patterns in international scholarly contexts, the paper proposes a more differentiated way of thinking about epistemic pluralism. Rather than framing epistemological difference primarily in terms of moral urgency or ontological opposition, it suggests attending to the interaction between epistemologies, writing styles, and research practices as they are actually enacted in the study of religion. In doing so, the paper contributes to the conference theme "Religion 360°" by offering a reflexive perspective on how multiple angles of knowing religion are negotiated, translated, and constrained within contemporary scholarly infrastructures.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 15: Itzhak Weismann** – University of Haifa

*Peaceful Islam: Shaykh Abdallah ibn Bayyah and the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace*

Abdallah Ibn Bayyah (b. 1935) has been one of the most remarkable Islamic scholars in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He is the founder and head of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace and initiator of a new branch of Islamic jurisprudence – the jurisprudence of peace. Born in Mauritania, Ibn Bayyah followed in his early career the modernist approach, which sought to adapt Islam to contemporary circumstances through the juristic principle of *maqasid al-sharia* – the purposes of the Law. Concomitantly, he engaged in politics and served as Vice President of the republic. After a military coup, Ibn Bayyah left for Saudi Arabia and took up a teaching position at the University of Jeddah. During that time, he shifted to the Islamist *wasati* (centrist-moderate) trend and was co-founder and vice president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), specializing in the novel field of jurisprudence of Islamic minorities in the West. The chaos of the "Arab Spring," turned Ibn Bayyah into a neo-traditionalist. He came to believe that only an "enlightened autocrat" could restore order and associated with Zayd bin Khalifa, the Emir of the United Arab Emirates in laying the foundation for the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies (FPPMS), later renamed the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace. In the twelve years since its inauguration, the interests of the forum have expanded to the global arena. It hosts annual interfaith meetings of Muslim, Christian and Jewish men of religion and academics and encourages research in the jurisprudence of peace. It also provided the religious legitimacy for the Abrahamic Accord. My presentation follows the religio-political itinerary of Shaykh Abdallah Ibn Bayyah from Modernism in Mauritania, through Islamism in Saudi Arabia to Neo-Traditionalism in the UAE. I will analyze his main works in each phase and sort out the changes as well continuities that took place in his ideas and activities between the three phases. Special attention will be given to the last phase, which constitutes Ibn Bayyah's mature thought, and to the activities of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 19: Anita Stašulāne** – Daugavpils University

*The Current Problems with the Legal Status of (Neo)pagans in the Baltics*

The Baltic states' (neo)pagan groups belong to the stream of reconstructed paganism, which, based on ancient Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian folklore, has reconstructed ancient religious beliefs and traditions, so that they can be practiced nowadays. This presentation examines current challenges related to the legal status of (neo)pagan groups in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Despite shared characteristics, significant differences shaped by historical and political contexts can be observed. In Latvia and Lithuania, (neo)pagan groups argue that they are entitled to the same legal status as "traditional denominations" (Latvia) or as "religious communities" (Lithuania). In Estonia, by contrast, (neo)pagan groups are primarily engaged in broader debates concerning religious freedom, religious education, and the preservation of historical sacred sites. The legal treatment of (neo)pagan groups constitutes a serious test for the legal systems of the Baltic states, as it raises sensitive issues such as the legal recognition of marriages solemnised within (neo)pagan communities, the protection of spouses' inheritance rights, and the possibility of learning about (neo)pagan beliefs in educational institutions. Central to these debates is

the question of granting the status of a religious organisation to (neo)pagan groups and recognising them as "traditional denominations" (Latvia), "traditional religious associations" (Lithuania), or as a "church," "congregation," "association of congregations," or "monastery" (Estonia). For these reasons, the legal status of (neo)pagan groups in the Baltic states vividly manifests the dilemma between the principle of equality and the entitlement to rights faced by constitutional democracies. This dilemma asks for a more serious consideration of the secularity, legality and human rights protection of a state, which are still indispensable instruments of a functional and pluralistic Western democracy.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 20: Jonathan Cahana-Blum** – Hebrew University of Jerusalem  
*David Koresh's Pilgrimages to Israel: Messianic and Political Perspectives*

David Koresh's recurrent visits to Israel were crucial in shaping his theological development, self-conception, and apocalyptic vision. With each journey, both Koresh's sense of purpose and the trust his followers placed in him intensified. His increasingly cohesive apocalyptic vision intertwined spiritual salvation with a radical political agenda. This potent blend of messianic fervour and political ambition would later contribute to the disastrous events at Waco, Texas, in 1993. Despite the significance of these events, the specifics of what transpired during each visit and their impact on Koresh and the Branch Davidians remain inadequately understood. Existing accounts have yet to integrate the available evidence into a cohesive narrative. My research seeks to address this by both synthesizing the dispersed primary evidence and incorporating previously untapped sources, including Hebrew-language publications and firsthand interviews with individuals who encountered Koresh during his visits. In this paper, I will attempt to draw a coherent picture of how Koresh's pilgrimages not only solidified his self-conception as the Messiah but also delineated a striking political dimension in his vision – one that cast the modern State of Israel and the United States as sworn enemies in an unfolding cosmic drama. It would then be his movement that would rally to lead the battle on the Israeli side and eventually – with the help of God – would secure its victory. As these themes resonate within contemporary evangelical pro-Israel movements, the study of Koresh's pilgrimages offers not only historical insight but also a lens through which to examine emerging political-religious dynamics.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 21: Margrethe Løøv** – NLA University College, Bergen  
*Networking Spirituality: Entrepreneurship and Power in the New Age Movement*

Unruly, unorthodox, unorganized: the New Age movement has often been presented in a language of negations, and described as a fluctuating field with few organizing forces. This paper looks beyond these stereotypes. Across different social contexts, social interaction takes on networked dynamics, and this paper discusses how the particular case of contemporary spirituality relates to general theoretical assumptions about social networks in general, and networked religion in particular. The paper presents a case study of actors who take part of a common network related to alternative spirituality in Norway. Many people who are involved in alternative spirituality regard themselves as spiritual individualists resistant to religious authority. At the same time, they do draw upon external sources in their 'individual' quests for self-development, spiritual enlightenment and well-being. In the absence of formal authorities they seek guidance from spiritual entrepreneurs and established modes of thinking and acting. Exploring the role of media, mind-body-spirit fairs, events and their gatekeepers, this paper discusses how a few key actors hold considerable power; not only over the organized networks related to New Age spirituality, but also over the ideas, norms, tropes and practices that circulate in the movement.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 22: Julia Folkesson Norberg** – Södertörn University  
*The Scandinavian Mission in Print: Swedish Mormonism and Mass Media Technology 1851-1877*

Mormonism arrived in Sweden in 1850, twenty years after the Church's American formalization. Heavily monitored by Swedish media, the first missionaries established the Scandinavian Mission (1850-1905), an organization which came to parallel the development of Swedish modernity and mass culture. By using

the Mission as a case study, I argue that the surge of Swedish Mormonism was informed by the advent of mass media technologies. The article draws on the first two decades of the Mission's news publication, *Skandinaviens Stjerne*, "The Scandinavian Star". The period begins with the start of the newspaper (1851) and ends with the ratification of the first Swedish religious law (1873), which enabled Swedes to convert to Mormonism without fear of prosecution. My perspective underlines a recent Mormon studies trend, which internationalizes Mormonism's history. The trend contrasts earlier studies, which positioned global Mormon traditions as one homogenic culture with a uniform origin, often beginning with Joseph Smith finding the golden plates. In 2026, the Mormon Church is wealthier than both Coca Cola and Disney and are actively implementing digital technologies revolutionizing the religion. Now, the once niche tradition has gained international pop cultural traction and is negotiated by globally dispersed reality shows and social media influencers. As was the case back then: by using 19th century media, the newspaper, my synchronic example historicizes the current moment. After a 1968 dissertation, this is the second study made on Swedish Mormonism. Keywords: Mormonism, global Mormonism, Second Great Awakening, Christianity, Sweden, Scandinavia, modernity, mass media, pop culture.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 23: Karin Yngvesdotter Lind** – Independent researcher  
*Tzniut and Frumkeit: Modesty expressed in Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Swedish Jewish Dress*

This presentation theorises Swedish-Jewish women's dress in the mid-nineteenth century as a site of embodied negotiation between religious normativity, bourgeois respectability, and socio-cultural integration. Drawing on sociological and semiotic approaches to dress as non-verbal communication, particularly the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Erving Goffman, the study conceptualises clothing as a form of symbolic practice through which modesty, piety, and belonging were actively produced and made legible within specific historical contexts. The analysis is grounded in previously understudied visual sources, including *carte de visite* photographs from Swedish-Jewish family albums, alongside portraiture and preserved sartorial objects. These materials are analysed comparatively in relation to contemporary non-Jewish photographic material and European fashion discourse of the period. Rather than assuming the existence of a stable Jewish dress code, the article interrogates how concepts such as *tzniut* and *frumkeit* functioned as flexible, historically contingent interpretative frameworks rather than as fixed halakhic prescriptions. The findings suggest that Swedish-Jewish women across socio-economic strata and migration backgrounds largely adopted dominant bourgeois fashion norms. Modesty—expressed through covering the body and, among older women, the hair—emerges as a shared cultural idiom embedded in nineteenth-century European gender ideology rather than as a marker of religious distinctiveness. The absence of visible sartorial differentiation is interpreted as a strategic mode of visual conformity within a minority context shaped by emancipation, antisemitism, and internal Jewish diversity. By framing dress as an arena of cultural translation and symbolic boundary work, the article contributes to theoretical discussions on religion, material culture, and migration, and demonstrates how modesty operates as a relational and context-dependent category within modern Jewish history.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 025: Kareem P.A. McDonald** – University of Copenhagen  
*Algorithmic Theology in Court: AI Islam and the Danish Quran Law*

This paper examines the emergence of what may be termed "AI Islam" in a Danish courtroom, focusing on the 2023 Danish Quran Law and its first judicial test in the 2025 prosecution of Rasmus Paludan and Dennis Corell Iversen. Drawing on and extending Jonas Svensson's concept of "non-human Islam," the paper analyses how artificial intelligence enters legal reasoning not merely as a technical instrument but as a discursive and epistemic authority. A central issue in the trial concerned whether an English translation of the Quran could be classified as a text of "significant religious importance," a category introduced by the Danish Quran Law. In a striking moment, the defence submitted statements generated by ChatGPT on the status of Quranic translations within Islam, thereby mobilising generative AI as a source of theological clarification. This intervention foregrounded questions of

authority, interpretation, and legitimacy, while simultaneously reconfiguring the boundaries between expert knowledge, religious tradition, and machine-generated discourse. The paper argues that the courtroom functions here as a crucial site of discursive convergence in which Islam, law, and artificial intelligence are mutually constituted. Rather than simply reflecting pre-existing understandings of religion, the use of generative AI produces a particular social imaginary of machine authority that reshapes how religion is defined, recognised, and regulated in public and legal contexts. By situating "AI Islam" within a legal-public arena, the paper contributes to broader debates in the study of religions concerning religious mediation, discursive entanglements, and the epistemic and political effects of emerging human-machine relations—issues that resonate directly with the increasing need to reassess how religious knowledge is produced, authorised, and circulated today.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 026: Lena Roos** – Södertörn University

*Jewish Thought between Jewish and Thought: A Meeting of Academic Cultures*

This presentation is a meta-reflection on an ongoing research project that deals with some of the key Jewish thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Hermann Cohen, Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem and others. The point of departure of the research project was that the philosophy of these thinkers emerged from the meeting between traditional, Eastern European Jewish tradition and secular Western academic philosophy. Yet, one more meeting of traditions occurred within the project itself, since it contained scholars from two distinct fields: philosophy and study of religions/Jewish studies. This contributed to a richer understanding of the texts, since each group of scholars were sensitive to different "echoes" in the texts. But it also presented sometimes unexpected challenges since the two groups came from different traditions of scholarship, more different than the participants maybe had expected from the outset. What methods and perspectives were allowed when approaching the texts? What was a desirable outcome of the study of a philosophical text? What were the ideal forms for speaking about the texts or for presenting the results? To what extent could the two groups of scholars let their differences be an advantage, and to what extent did they fail to communicate, often because they each spoke within different academic traditions, using different terminology or meaning different things by the terms used, referring to different "canonical" texts that everyone were presumed to be familiar with. Often the participants were like when St Augustine describes the meeting of two people who do not understand the language of the other: "For if two men, each ignorant of the other's language, meet and are compelled by some necessity not to pass on but to remain together, then it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together than for them, though both are human beings." (*City of God*, XIX, 7) In the end, I will try to outline a few suggestions for how such a cooperation can actually be beneficial, not just for the task at hand, but also for the intellectual development of the participating scholars.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 29: Linda Vikdahl Günséus** – Södertörn University

*Teaching Life Questions for Students with Intellectual Disabilities*

In Sweden, teachers are required to teach life questions within the framework of religious education. At the same time, research shows that teachers generally do not prioritize integrating life questions—that is, questions concerning the fundamental conditions of human life and existence—into their teaching. The reasons for this have not been extensively explored, but two plausible explanations are that teachers may lack training and didactic tools for addressing existential themes, and that such questions may be perceived as too sensitive to discuss in the classroom. There is no reason to assume that teachers working in upper secondary schools for students with intellectual disabilities (USSID) would be more inclined to address life questions; on the contrary, the opposite may be the case. Students in USSID often have life circumstances that differ significantly from those of their peers, which places particular and complex demands on teachers' instructional practices. This presentation is based on a study that examines the teaching of life questions at an upper secondary school for students with intellectual disabilities (USSID), with the aim of contributing to the development of pedagogical practice. The study is based on

qualitative interviews with eight students, two teachers, and a principal, and the empirical material was analyzed using symbolic interactionism. The study addresses, among other things, the following research questions:

- What life questions are raised by teachers and students in the teaching of life questions at USSID?
- What challenges do teachers face in teaching life questions, and how do they navigate these difficulties?

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 32: Johan Brun Mendes Cederfeldt** – Aarhus University

*Prospects for a Theory of Physiolatry: An Argument for a New Category of Ritual Action*

The concept of "nature worship" was once central to the study of religion, as was the perspective that man's encounter with the physical world of nature was foundational for the emergence of notions of the sacred. Such figures as Friedrich Max Müller, Wilhelm Mannhardt, James G. Frazer and Mircea Eliade bear witness, each in their own way, to the prominence of this preoccupation within scholarship on religion. This perspective has been amply criticised for harboring primitivistic and normatively charged assumptions. Yet contemporary concerns with ecology, sacred nature, and environmental crisis have today revived interest in how religions relate to the natural world. This relation deserves renewed theoretical attention. My paper revisits classic questions about the relationship between religion and nature and proposes a new theoretical framework centered on the concept of *physiolatry*. This concept I define, briefly put, as ritually mediated practices that serve to stabilise symbolic relations between empirical natural phenomena and trans-empirical religious entities. As its inverse form, I propose the term *physioclasm* (understood as techniques of disembedding religious entities from the natural world). I thus aim to frame the question of sacred nature as bound to religious practice. By formulating the integration of nature into religious systems as a dynamic symbolic and ritual process, I aim to provide a theoretical tool which could in principle be applied to any empirical context within the history of religion.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 34: Ioannis E. Kastanas** – Neapolis University Pafos, Paphos

*The Theologically Inspired Methods of the Administrative Judge*

In France and in all countries that have been influenced by its legal system, such as Greece, it is consistently accepted that the Administration may not comply with the legal rules governing their actions in a specific case when there are exceptional circumstances that make such compliance unfavorable to the public interest (in French: *théorie des circonstances exceptionnelles*). This is a jurisprudential construction that some authors call legitimate illegality. Basically, it is not an exception to the principle of legality, but an addition of a rule of law according to which the Administration can act in a way different from that imposed by the relevant provisions when this is justified by the public interest because there are exceptional circumstances which the Courts review. This jurisprudence bears similarities to the state of exception as defined by Agamben. However, we believe it has a theological background. It is inspired by the principle of ecclesiastical economy. Ecclesiastical economy is found only in the field of Ecclesiastical (Canon) Law and consists in the non-exact observance of a certain sacred canon by the competent organ of the Church in a specific case for reasons of leniency or spiritual interest. However, it cannot be identified with leniency as defined by the state legal order. It is always applied ad hoc and in concreto, while it does not create a precedent.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 35: Isabella Schilcher** – Stockholm University

*Political Myth and Cultural Memory in Early Japan: Sword Narratives in the Kojiki and Their Religio-Political Implications*

This paper examines how sword narratives in the *Kojiki* were systematically adapted and employed to create an overarching political myth aimed at consolidating Yamato sovereignty during the Nara period. Compiled in 712, the *Kojiki* constitutes the earliest surviving written account from Japan. Despite being

conceptualised as an imperial chronicle, the text's historical content is predominantly obscured by legendary and mythical narratives that were devised to legitimise the imperial lineage and its affiliated clans. The present study examines the manner in which older mythic narratives were reinterpreted and combined with newly articulated traditions, in order to establish an authoritative hierarchy of myth and to construct a particular vision of the past. Myths and legends featuring swords are a recurring theme throughout the ancient account. Of particular significance is the sequence concerning the Kusanagi sword. However, the account exhibits notable inconsistencies, suggesting that the narrative has been deliberately modified for political purposes, ultimately contributing to the establishment of a political myth that will determine Japan's religious understanding for centuries to come: the emperor's descent from the sun goddess Amaterasu. This divine rule is further illustrated through Kusanagi's physical representation in the present world. As one of the imperial regalia, it is continuously passed on to the next emperor in the enthronement ceremony. The Kusanagi narrative thus expresses a form of "double legitimacy", in which divine genealogy and material object mutually reinforce one another to authorise rulership. In order to place this rhetoric of legitimacy within a broader East Asian context, the paper compares sword stories from the Kojiki with Chinese historiographical traditions, such as the accounts of Sima Qian. A thorough review of the records indicates significant structural parallels with the Japanese narratives, thereby suggesting that the Japanese narrative structure is not merely coincidental, but rather constitutes a crucial element of a well-established tradition in which the conferral and transfer of swords is regarded as an expression of legitimate sovereignty. Drawing on theories of cultural memory, the paper considers what it means for a political myth to be fixed as "history". It emphasises the normative character of the reconfigured narrative: once set into writing, it installs a particular court-authorized kami-hierarchy into the collective memory - one designed to persist for centuries through textual fixation, ritual repetition, and the material presence of the sword as imperial regalia. In this way, the Kojiki does not merely preserve tradition; it establishes a lasting religious and historical framework within which political power is divinely grounded and which is repeatedly reaffirmed through ritual practice.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 36: Dumitru Lisnic** – Ioan Petru Culianu Institute for Religious Studies / George Emil Palade University, Târgu Mureș

*Making Religion Legible: NKVD's Liquidation Commissions and Religious Communities in Soviet Ukraine, 1920–1929*

This paper explores the history of the so-called Liquidation Commissions, NKVD committees charged with enforcing the separation of church and state decreed by the Bolsheviks in 1918. It demonstrates how, between 1920 and 1929, Soviet policing techniques for controlling and examining religious life operated and why they often failed to function as intended. The research takes a material approach in its analysis of the interaction between religious communities, soviet officials, bureaucratic artefacts, and sacred objects and buildings. During this 1920s, liquidation officers experimented with various policing techniques designed to make religious communities legible, to serve as mechanisms of control over changes in the religious landscape, and to effect the "sedentarisation" of religious believers and leaders. Guided by the conviction that "scientific rigor" in collecting and systematising data on religious communities would help eliminate religion, liquidation officers compiled files on each registered parish, minutes of parish meetings, maps, catalogues containing registration cards of religious leaders and miracles, and other materials used to police believers. In order to compel religious believers to cooperate in producing these bureaucratic artefacts, the liquidation officers leveraged religious buildings and sacred object by nationalising them and providing the right to use them only to officially registered communities. Likewise, by defining the criteria through which the Soviet secret police identified illegal (unregistered) religious communities and persecuted them, liquidation officials shaped the characteristics of the Soviet religious underground, in which believers developed new ways of practicing religion and techniques for concealing their activities from official surveillance. This paper draws on insights from Actor-Network Theory and James C. Scott's work on modern state policies aimed at

making governed populations legible. The study is based on archival materials produced by the NKVD, secret police, Party, and state agencies in Soviet Ukraine.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 38: Peggy Schmeiser** – University of Saskatchewan  
*When Two Rights Make a Wrong: Freedom of Religion vs. Legal Equality*

Scholarship sometimes termed "critical religion" exposes religion as a historically constructed and malleable colonialist system of classification used to distinguish and regulate people, beliefs and behaviours. Vestigial state theory posits religion as a product of statecraft linked to governance and social hegemony. Building on these frameworks, western legislative processes and law are observed to play a key role in state manufacturing and regulation of religion. Litigation and court rulings about conflicts at the intersection of religious freedom and other equality provisions have great social consequences and warrant closer scrutiny by scholars of religion. This paper will first explore how the mutable category of religion is deployed by state and non-state actors to achieve or impede equality. Various examples will be analyzed, including: approaches of various western nations like France, Germany and Canada, to the wearing of perceived religious clothing and symbols in the public sector; legal challenges against faithbased institutions in Canada that refuse to provide medical assistance in dying; churches internationally that will not ordain women, nor solemnize legally recognized same-sex marriages; and, freedom of religion provisions currently invoked in the United States to argue for reproductive services following a recent ruling restricting their access. As these examples demonstrate, the category of religion intersects with equality in complex and diverse ways. Final reflections will explore how recognizing religion as a constructed category and tool of governance opens new opportunities for challenging normative assumptions about society and inequality, as we work towards a more just future.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 39: Naomi Fujiwara** – University of Tokyo  
*Sites of Religious Contact: Fictitious Kirishitan Materials and Non-Christian Engagements with Christianity in Japan*

In Japan, where Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto have historically coexisted and at times fused, Christianity—introduced in the seventeenth century—has functioned less as a dominant tradition than as an object of intermittent contact, imagination, and reinterpretation. Although Christianity was prohibited during the Edo period, Kakure *Kirishitan* (Hidden Christians) maintained their faith in secrecy for more than 250 years. In the late Meiji era, however, romanticized images of the *Kirishitan* circulated widely through literature and popular discourse, attracting the interest of many non-Christian Japanese. Within this cultural milieu, certain objects—often originally Buddhist statues—came to be identified as Christian relics and, in some cases, were officially designated as cultural properties by local governments. This paper examines such objects as objects falsely attributed to *Kirishitan* devotion, hereafter referred to as "fictitious *Kirishitan* materials." Rather than treating these materials as mere errors or forgeries, the paper approaches them as sites of religious contact, where Christianity was encountered, imagined, and materially reconfigured by those who did not themselves belong to the tradition. By analyzing the processes through which these objects were reinterpreted and endowed with Christian meanings, this study explores why non-religious or non-Christian actors are drawn to religious narratives and material forms. In doing so, it contributes to the conference theme Religion 360° by highlighting how religion operates not only through belief and practice, but also through affective attraction, cultural imagination, and material engagements across religious boundaries.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 41: Hedda Lindstedt Grahm** – Södertörn University  
*Spirituality and Corporeality in Netivot Shalom and Slonim Hasidism*

Hasidism is often understood as a movement that affirms the body, as practices such as dance, song and eating are seen as ways of serving God, a concept known as *avodah be-gashmiyut*, "worship through

corporeality." However, Hasidic tradition also contains strong ascetic tendencies, where physical acts are surrounded with restrictions aimed at transforming the material practices into purely spiritual. The early Hasidim inherited the medieval Kabbalistic view of the body as a problematic site marked by anxiety and danger, a view which remains visible today. The Slonim dynasty, active in Israel, represents Hasidism's ascetic tendencies. In this presentation, I examine how corporeality and spirituality interact within 20<sup>th</sup>-century Slonim tradition, focusing on ideas about the male Hasidic body. Through selected readings from the seminal work *Netivot Shalom*, which functions as a religious guide for the male Hasid, I explore how modern Hasidic thought treats the body as both a means and an obstacle to spiritual strivings. The study proceeds from the premise that human corporeality is inescapable, even for the devoted ascetic. A second starting point is a gender-theoretical perspective: Hasidic textual tradition is largely a male endeavour where women and their bodies are othered. Highlighting the male perspective of the source material thus becomes a way of grappling with the question of what we study when we assume we study religion, whose perspective we are partaking in and why this matters. I argue that contextualising the male body within this tradition helps clarify its underlying beliefs, fears, and inner logic.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 42: Nabila Tasneem Anonnya** – Arizona State University

*Women's Bodies as Contested Terrain of the Nation: Islam, Secularism, and the Unresolved Politics of Nation-Building in Bangladesh*

This article explores the political project of nation-building in Bangladesh that is shaped by the unresolved relationship between secularism and Islam since 1971, situating the analysis at the intersection of political anthropology and the anthropology of religion. By charting the changing place of Islam in public-political discourse from the 1970s to the present, I show how Islam has been simultaneously constructed as a national threat to be managed and a source of political legitimacy within the national political arena. To trace these dynamics, the article foregrounds Bengali Muslim women's bodies as both a key site and a central terrain where national anxieties surrounding religion are negotiated, and where dynamics within national identity construction and national belonging are continuously produced and contested. Drawing on ethnographic research, I argue that Islam in Bangladesh functions not as a settled religious category but as a contested political force through which the national imaginaries are continuously constructed.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 43: Sonia Voinea** – UC Louvain

*Latin Birthday Poetry and the Study of Roman Religion*

Latin birthday poetry is frequently used as a source for reconstructing Roman religious practices associated with the celebration of the dies natalis. Because this private ritual has left only limited traces in historical and archaeological evidence, scholars of Roman religion have relied on poetic texts to fill this documentary gap. Such an approach, however, raises significant methodological concerns. Considering poetic representations as direct evidence for ritual practice risks confusing literary convention with cultic reality and concealing the mediating role of genres, aesthetics, and authorial positioning. This paper argues that modern reconstructions of Roman birthday rituals have insufficiently accounted for the discursive and poetic nature of their sources. The scholarly treatment of Latin birthday poetry as a distinct corpus originates with Emanuele Cesareo's monograph published in 1929, produced in the intellectual context of early twentieth-century Italy. Cesareo interpreted birthday poetry as evidence for the autonomy and national character of Roman literature, as well as for an alleged evolutionary movement from polytheism toward monotheism. Although his work remains influential in philological, religious and historical scholarship, its methodological premises and assumptions have never been subjected to critical reassessment. As a result, elements of this framework continue to shape contemporary interpretations, despite the fact that its evolutionary and nationalist model of Roman religion is no longer accepted. This paper reassesses the historiography of Latin birthday poetry and identifies biases underlying its use as religious evidence. It presents a renewed epistemological framework

that integrates literary analysis, genre theory, and historiographical critique, contributing to broader religious studies debates such as the modern construction of ancient religion.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 45: Orhan Jašić** – University of Sarajevo

*The Study of the History of Religions at the Theological Faculties of the University of Sarajevo*

A degree program in the academic study of religion (Ger. *Religionswissenschaft*) currently does not exist at any university in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. However, at the University of Sarajevo, there are two theological faculties, the Faculty of Islamic Studies and the Catholic Faculty of Theology, which offer courses related to the academic study of religion. These faculties initially existed within their respective religious institutions (the Islamic Community and the Catholic Church) but at the beginning of the twenty-first century they became full members of the University of Sarajevo, the largest public university in BiH. The Faculty of Islamic Studies within its undergraduate theological program offers the course *Introduction to the Study of Religion* which engages with topics from the history of religions. Similarly, at the Catholic Faculty of Theology, themes from the history of religions are addressed within the undergraduate course *Science of Religions*. The focus of this paper is on teaching methodology and the content of the two aforementioned courses. Our aim was to identify whether the curricula of these courses employ a teaching methodology associated with the academic study of religion or a theological one. In addition, we examined the extent to which topics related to the history of religions are present at these faculties as well as interpretative approaches through which it is taught.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 51: Anastasia Victoria Servan-Schreiber** – CREE – INaLCO, Paris / Tartu

*Ritual as World-Making: Embodiment, Social Imagination, and Contemporary Maausk in Estonia*

Contemporary Maausk in Estonia is frequently classified as paganism, even neopaganism, or as a new religious movement. Such labels, however, sometimes fail to capture what Maausk does in practice, and how its practitioners relate to it – preferring the idea of a "way of life" or "worldview." This paper argues that Maausk can become more intelligible when approached through ritual performance rather than belief, doctrine, or institutional definition. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, the paper examines Maausk rituals as embodied, performative acts through which participants actively produce relations between humans, land, ancestors, and non-human entities. Rituals are analysed as highly social world-making practices: they shape bodily dispositions, sensory engagement, and modes of sociality. Rather than expressing a fixed theology, ritual participation allows diverse motivations and interpretations to converge within shared forms of action. Focusing on ritual foregrounds how Maausk operates across domains often treated separately—religion, heritage, ecology, and identity—without stabilizing into a clearly bounded religious system. In a highly secularised society, ritual provides a mode of commitment and continuity that does not rely on belief-centred models of religion, but on practice, presence, and embodied experience that contribute to giving meaning to everyday life experience. More broadly, the presentation contributes to debates on lived and vernacular religion by showing how ritual analysis reveals forms of spirituality that resist classification. It proposes ritual performance as a key analytical lens for understanding how meaning, legitimacy, and collective futures are enacted in plural and secular contexts.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 52: Caroline Klintborg** – Stockholm University

*Children's Religious Agency in Secular Sweden: Between Self-Defined Faith and Conditional Salvation*

Sweden has long been described as one of the world's most secularized countries, a society in which those with religious affiliations have often been regarded as "the different others." Recent studies, however, indicate a growing interest in spirituality, especially among children and young people. The aim of the paper is to discuss two contrasting portrayals of children and youth within Christian traditions in a Swedish context. The first concerns children and young people who describe their religious belonging as

self-chosen, with a faith whose content they are free to articulate themselves. The second concerns children and youth who describe their affiliation with a religious community as coercive—both in this life and in relation to an imagined heaven after death. The theoretical point of departure for the discussion is the "five concepts of religion" as presented by Linda Woodhead.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 53: Dan Hansén** – Södertörn University

*Autoethnography: A Way to Bridge and Reframe the Constructivist and Non-constructivist Debate about Experiences of "Pure Consciousness Events" to Advance the Study of Mysticism*

Autoethnography is sometimes a controversial topic even within fields where it is applied. Critique of the method is that the researcher is no longer objective and "goes native." This paper proposes to take autoethnography seriously and develop the method within the Study of Religions, and more specifically within the study of mysticism. Various approaches exist today (e.g. meditation, breathwork, psychedelic administration and VR) that may induce altered states of consciousness. This can serve as a starting point for examining how so-called "pure consciousness events" may occur, often discussed as a criterion of mystical experience. Constructivists and non-constructivists can use this method to conduct a more systematic investigation of the phenomenological experience itself. Researchers can problematize these "pure consciousness events" within methodological and theoretical frameworks, with the potential to evaluate claims that individuals in different parts of the world and historical eras have expressed when they report on these experiences. This can potentially bridge and reframe the disagreement between constructivists and non-constructivists to advance the study of mysticism. Neuroscience as a quantitative method can offer valuable correlational accounts of the relationship between brain activity and experience but is limited in investigating the subjective phenomenology. There is a knowledge gap here and autoethnography can contribute to generating knowledge about these experiences. Method development requires a discussion about reflexivity and context. But it should not stop at the discussion stage, one way forward is to test the method and be open about what does not work, adjust the method and test again.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 54: Juris Jefuni** – Daugavpils University, European Christian Academy

*The problem of autocephaly in the contemporary practice of the Orthodox Church. The case of the 1923 Statute of the Latvian Orthodox Church*

Theologians, historians and religious researchers periodically address the issue of autocephaly, explaining the evolution of autocephaly in diverse regional contexts. This subject takes on greater importance when a new autocephaly is established within a country (in a context of its independency), requiring theological justification and understanding of the historical experience. The issue of the autocephaly of the Latvian Orthodox Church has become relevant due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which began in 2022. This issue has rarely garnered the attention of scholars in the Baltic States. This report is devoted to a little-studied historical source which contained regulations regarding the external and internal life of the Latvian Orthodox Church and was important for the Latvian state and society (1923 Statute of the Latvian Orthodox Church) and a role of this document in understanding the phenomenon of autocephaly. This report is interdisciplinary, combining historical and theological approaches.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 55: Adriana Cupcea** – Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities / New Europe College, Bucharest

*Practicing Islam in the Millet Community in Dobruja (Romania)*

The objective of the research is to explore religiosity within an urban community in Dobruja (Romania), which defines itself as Millet, and which is perceived from the outside as Muslim Roma. My approach is based on the definition of religiosity given by Elbasany and Roy (2019) in the context of the revitalization of Islam in the Balkans after 1990, as the way in which each individual/believer experiences his/her relationship with his/her own religion/faith. My research questions are: Who is the Millet

community, what is their narrative about themselves? What do Millet members understand by being Muslim? What importance does Islam have in their lives (post-1990) and how do they practice it? I approached the subject through the lens of anthropologist Gabriele Marranci's statement that Islam is essentially an emotional category, suggesting that we should understand Islam as a map of discourses about "what it is like to feel Muslim." From a methodological point of view, the study is based on field research (semi-structured interviews, life histories and participatory observation), conducted in July and October 2015 and in July 2023, in the town of Medgidia (Mecidiye), in the Dobrogea region.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 57: Maria Ericson** – Dalarna University, Falun and Borlänge

*Challenges and Opportunities for the Church of Sweden Regarding Transformative Reconciliation with the Roma and Sami National Minorities*

I will explore current issues within the Swedish context, paying particular attention to the Church of Sweden (Swedish Lutheran Church). As the established national church in Sweden since the Reformation, it faces a history of having been part of state policies of oppression against national minorities like the Roma and the indigenous Sami community. This includes issues of language, enforced assimilation and loss of identity, racism and land issues. How can transformative reconciliation be cultivated in this context? In this paper I will present, some of the recent initiatives for truth and reconciliation that have taken place, mainly by the Church of Sweden, but also how it connects to initiatives by the Swedish state. I will also, as a theoretical lens, explore the potential of transformative reconciliation and hospitality as a way of identifying both challenges and opportunities.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 59: Johanneke Kroesbergen-Kamps** – University of Pretoria / University of Amsterdam

*Growing Polarisation between Religious and Secular Actors in the Netherlands: The Case of Tom de Wal*

Studying religion means paying close attention to the ways in which religion as well as secularity are conceptualised on the ground. This paper addresses these questions by examining a specific case in which religious and secular values appear to be in conflict. On January 10, 2026, the Dutch charismatic pastor Tom de Wal was arrested after a deliverance service was dissolved by local authorities. Controversy surrounding the pastor had been building up in the media in the previous years. In this paper, I will analyse this controversy using David Bromley's internal-external polarisation model, which was originally developed for violent denouements in New Religious Movements. According to this model, insiders and outsiders both contribute to escalations. Through an analysis of sermons, books and social media posts by Tom de Wal as well as from his opponents, I will show that the events of January 2026 are a not-unexpected result of the growing tension between De Wal's radical Christianity, which sees persecution as an essential feature of the life of a true believer, and (secular) interest groups, who view religion in general as a threat to human freedom. Following Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt's model of multiple secularities, the paper will further show that the reaction to De Wal by the civil authorities illustrates a shift within the Dutch concept of secularity. This paper develops insights into the buildup and response to polarisation in contemporary societies.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 62: Marleen Thaler** – University of Graz

*Re-Imagining the Dragon: The Link between East Asian Geomancy and Traditionalism*

The English writer John Michell (1933-2009) held a significant position within British alternative religion. Michell's many books revolve around his lifelong aim to re-enchant the English landscape and launch a new golden age. Michell was also a devoted Traditionalist and is widely considered the founding father of the vast field of British Earth Mysteries. One decisive influence was Chinese geomancy. In this presentation, I will trace Michell's employment of East Asian, particularly Chinese, metaphors, techniques, and ideas associated with so-called "dragon lines." Michell and other representatives of British Earth Mysteries used such speculative theories of the earth, claiming the existence of telluric

(dragon) energies, which are believed to hold particular power and may be used as a means of knowledge transmission.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 65: Chae Young Kim** – Sogang University, Seoul

*Carl Gustav Jung on I Ching (周易) in his Letters*

This paper will attempt to trace how Jung was originally involved himself with I Ching. In so doing, it will articulate the initial occasion of his interest in relation to his disappointing experience on his father and Freud. Then, it will develop how three religious clergies, Keller, Wilhelm, and White, would have contributed to lead him to devote himself on reading and experimenting and advising with I Ching. More concretely Jung articulated these three points as the two symbolic "hexagrams" that he devoted himself for his whole life. One is about the enlargement of the current rationalistic intellectualism for the further deeper study of Christianity and its devotees in the West. This was the "homework" that he found in his conversation with his father. The other one was about the "homework" how to restore the religiosity of the human *psyche* and its meaning in the West. It was not simply the enlargement matter like the first one. It demanded strongly a radical confrontation with the contemporary intellectual environment of the secular and positivist perception of religion. This was really the most challenging "homework" that he realized in his traumatic experience on Freud's disappointing enforcement. In this sense, Jung's father's and Freud's statements would provide him with the constantly "living documents" for the new research of the human *psyche*. In his late years he came to find an important book with the assistance of the three religious clergies which his new perspective would be supported historically and empirically beyond the West. It was to him the great discovery of I Ching.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 70: Hanna Morkowska** – University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin

*Epicurean Piety, from the Fear of Gods to Divine Happiness*

Epicurus' moral philosophy constitutes a kind of therapy. The philosopher believed that numerous anxieties that plague the human soul stand in the way of one's happiness. He saw the cure in acquiring the appropriate knowledge that would allow for inner transformation. One of the most important anxieties to be overcome is the fear of the gods. Epicurus therefore developed his own doctrine of deities, distinct from the traditional vision, in order to bring humans peace of mind. This paper will attempt to demonstrate the specificity of the Epicurean gods, taking into account both the historical and cultural realities of the era and the fundamental assumptions of this movement in natural philosophy and moral thought. The importance and dual role of the gods in the ethical system of this philosophical school will be presented. The definition of piety and its meaning for the Epicurean sage will be examined. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that in order to correctly reconstruct and evaluate the doctrine of gods developed by Epicurus, it should be interpreted with particular regard to the therapeutic nature of Epicurean ethics. At the same time, the significance of research on ancient philosophical doctrines of the gods for contemporary ethics will be emphasized.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 71: Alireza Rezwani** – Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran

*A Philosophical Inquiry into the Suicide Crisis: The Role of Religion in the Transition from Nihilism to a Purposeful Life*

Suicide, as one of the most complex human dilemmas, has always been a subject of reflection for philosophers, psychologists, and theologians. In contemporary philosophy, particularly within the existentialist tradition, suicide is regarded not merely as a mental illness but as a response to the "problem of meaning." Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, considers suicide to be the fundamental question of philosophy, viewing it as a consequence of the feeling of "absurdity" arising from the conflict between humanity's quest for meaning and the meaningless silence of the universe. This condition, referred to in philosophy as "nihilism," is precisely the collapse of meaning that drives an individual toward self-destruction. The central question of this study is whether religions, by offering an alternative

system of meaning, can overcome this crisis and facilitate the transition from "meaninglessness" to a "purposeful life." The paper hypothesizes that religion, beyond its social and ritual functions, operates at its deepest level as a "response to the question of meaning." Employing the method of philosophical analysis and religious hermeneutics, this research first explores the concept of "meaninglessness" in the thought of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Camus. It then focuses on the concept of "meaning" within religious traditions (particularly the Abrahamic faiths), demonstrating how religion, by "sanctifying life" and "placing suffering within a divine horizon of meaning," enables a form of "logotherapy." The findings suggest that religion, through concepts such as "divine trial," "hope for salvation," and "connection with the Transcendent," can serve as an effective antidote to nihilism, guiding the individual from the impasse of suicide toward a purposeful life. The study concludes that a dialogue between existential philosophy and practical theology can open new horizons in the field of suicide prevention.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 72: Alexandre Foucher** – Independent scholar  
*Matérialisme actuel et croyances religieuses*

Le matérialisme des sociétés agit comme une propagande sur les religions. Chacune devient un produit de consommation. Les mythes eschatologiques de Platon entrent dans le genre du discours religieux. Ils sont notamment une réponse à l'accusation portée contre Socrate de nier l'existence des dieux, accusation portée par les sophistes qui participent à l'émergence de sociétés matérialistes qui sont peut-être religieuses dans les actes mais agnostiques ou athées dans les intentions. Nous visons nous l'individualisme sociétal qui est au cœur du fonctionnement des sociétés occidentales. Les discours religieux sont devenus produits fonctionnels, enfermés dans des écrits ou des communications, une place sociale précise leur est donnée à côté du divertissement, l'environnement professionnel dominant largement les modes de vie. Les religions monothéistes du livre sont pour cela plus facilement manipulables et donc utilisables par le matérialisme individualiste sociétal. En réponse, les religions se durcissent dans le dogmatisme, les souplesses naturelles de pratiques et d'interprétation étant prises pour des faiblesses. Ce rigorisme fait le lit du matérialisme par la réification claire et distinguable d'un objet situé dans l'imaginaire de l'au-delà abstrait, laissant la matière décider des valeurs ici-bas selon son idéologie propre, que ce soit dans les débats sur la contraception ou sur la fin de vie, et que ce soit dans la représentation de l'amour devenu fonction d'individualisme et non plus réalisation ou continuation. Cette étude philosophique cherche à expliciter comment l'idéologie matérialisme individualiste mondialisée dépersonnalise les croyances religieuses et sclérose les religions.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 73: Simon Sorgenfrei** – Södertörn University  
*"Mysticism's Native Language". *Mysticism as Genre and Collective Practice**

Since the publication of William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), mysticism has primarily been framed as an individual, direct encounter with a divine reality—an interior state that transcends rational thought and remains inherently ineffable (Qadir & Tiaynen-Qadir 2024). This emphasis on private experience, however, often obscures the interpersonal frameworks that shape mystical life. By analyzing the correspondence of Hjalmar Ekström (1885–1962), widely regarded as one of Sweden's most significant Christian mystics (Geels 1980, 2017), this paper proposes an alternative approach. Moving beyond the lens of solitary interiority, I argue for the recognition of mysticism as a genre of social action and a site of collective practice.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 74: Danial Ghasempour** – Stockholm University  
*Mapping the Use of Educational Films on Islam. Insights from Swedish Religious Education Teachers*

This article investigates how religious education (RE) teachers in Sweden use educational films about Islam, which platforms and types of films they select, and which frame factors shape these decisions. The empirical material consists of a national survey of RE teachers in compulsory and upper secondary

schools, complemented by semi-structured interviews with a selection of survey respondents. The results show that film is an established and recurrent element in teaching about Islam. Public service-related and subscription-based platforms are used more extensively than open platforms such as YouTube, which are used more selectively. Films are primarily used to convey knowledge and factual information, but also for repetition, the introduction of key concepts, and to make Islam visible in a Swedish context. The interviews deepen this picture by showing how choices of films and themes are steered by the interaction between schools' economic conditions and subscriptions, platform accessibility and searchability, student group composition, and local geographical circumstances. In addition, ongoing public and media debates about Islam, to which some teachers feel obliged to respond, further influence these choices. The study thus demonstrates how media landscapes and frame factors co-construct and direct the ways in which Islam is mediated in Swedish RE.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 75: Stefano Gandini** – Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

*On the Need for Pluriversal Knowledge: Andean Perspectives and Religious Studies*

This paper examines the Andean concepts of Sumak Kawsay ("good living") and Pacha to address key questions in religious studies: what we study, how, and why — especially when indigenous ontologies reject the human/nature divide embedded in many disciplines. Through close analysis of highland Andean cosmovision — e.g., ayllu-based relational ethics linking humans, mountains (Apu), and Pachamama — the study shows non-dualistic ontologies where religion appears as embedded reciprocity (ayni) rather than isolated beliefs. Drawing on Andean–Amazonian ethnography and philosophy, it argues these concepts challenge disciplinary homogeneity and reveal limits of methods and categories grounded in Western secular assumptions. The paper calls not for replacement but for expansion of religious studies toward a pluriversal dialogue that reframes research questions, methods, and institutional practices. Embracing pluriversalism foregrounds multiple coexisting worlds and ways of knowing, fostering epistemic reciprocity and transformative dialogue across ontologies.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 76: Göran Larsson** – University of Gothenburg

*A Nexus between Police Studies and the Psychology of Religion: The Pioneering Work of Hjalmar Sundén*

Hjalmar Sundén (1908–1993), Sweden's first professor of the psychology of religion, earned his doctorate at Uppsala University. Yet he later claimed that it was at the Swedish Police Academy in Stockholm where he truly learned how to practise psychology, describing the academy as "a university of psychology." This paper explores the significance of that experience for Sundén's intellectual development and for the broader relationship between police studies and the psychology of religion. The first aim of my paper is to analyse how Sundén's teaching at the Police Academy shaped his understanding of psychology, particularly the psychology of religion, and influenced his broader approach to religious studies. The paper argues that his engagement with police training sharpened his attention to situational interpretation, and role-taking in concrete social contexts. The second aim is to examine how the academic study of religion can function within professional education, using police training as a case study. This raises broader questions about the public relevance of religious studies and its contribution to professions not primarily concerned with religion. I argue that Sundén's work exemplifies what today would be described as the development of transferable skills within the non-confessional study of religion. By highlighting the practical dimensions of his engagement with policing, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions about the societal utility and applied potential of religious studies. The analysis is based on a close reading of Sundén's writings, complemented by reflections drawn from my own experience as guest professor at the Faculty of Police Work at the University of Borås, Sweden.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 77: Mehmet Kalkan** – Marmara University, Istanbul

*Constructing the "Other" in Christian Visual Culture: Representations of Muslims from a History of Religions Perspective (12<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*

This paper examines representations of Muslims, "Turks," and the religious "Other" in Christian visual culture produced between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries from a history of religions perspective. Paintings, sculptures, and reliefs created within the Christian tradition are analysed not merely as artistic expressions, but as visual discourses shaped by theological, historical, and political concerns. Drawing on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, the study argues that these representations functioned as part of a broader system of knowledge and power through which Islam was constructed as a religious and cultural Other. The depiction of Muslims as violent, demonic, or uncivilized is examined in relation to Christian theological narratives and historical conflict memories. Furthermore, the paper explores how these early visual representations continue to influence contemporary perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Europe. By situating visual culture within the study of religions, the paper highlights the role of representation in the formation, transmission, and persistence of religious difference.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 78: Fatemeh Moslehzaheh** – Lund University  
*Motherhood in a Modern Conservative Shi'i Context*

This article explores how highly educated, middle-class, conservative Shi'i women in Tehran conceptualize and practice motherhood within the entanglements of modern urban life and devotional commitment. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted as part of a broader project on lived religion, it analyzes semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and digital materials to examine how motherhood becomes a central site for negotiating faith, gender, and modernity. Rather than treating religiosity as a fixed ideological framework, the study approaches motherhood as a domain of everyday religious practice. It shows how women integrate prayer, Qur'anic recitation, majāles attendance, and invocations of Shi'i theological concepts—such as *tavassol* and *entezār*—into daily routines of childcare, discipline, emotional care, and digital supervision. Motherhood is framed simultaneously as a religious duty, an ethical project of *tarbiat-e dini* (religious upbringing), and a space of affective labor shaped by contemporary parenting discourses, social media, and state population policies. The findings highlight generational shifts: while participants value continuity with their mothers' piety, they adopt reflexive, psychologically informed, and digitally mediated parenting styles. In this modern conservative Shi'i context, motherhood emerges not as passive submission to patriarchal norms but as an arena of moral agency, where women actively reconcile sacred commitments with secular knowledge, individual aspirations, and the uncertainties of raising children in twenty-first-century Iran.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 80: Fabian Haefke** – Social Science Institute of EKD, Hannover  
*The Construction and Mobilization of 'the Religious' in Lay-Professional Interaction: A Qualitative Analysis of Changes in Religious Communication in the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)*

Sociodemographic transformations are increasingly challenging the conditions of religious communication within the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). Recent research on religious change highlights a set of interrelated dynamics: rising religious disaffiliation and the resulting fiscal pressures on ecclesiastical institutions; a weakening intergenerational transmission of Christian belief and practice, which reduces familiarity with Protestant religious culture; and growing religious pluralization in Protestant fields of action. Taken together, these changing conditions challenge established forms of religious communication and reshape lay-professional interactions. This paper examines how these shifts transform religious communication in everyday practice and how they alter the practical meanings of "the religious" across different fields of action. Drawing on qualitative interviews with religious professionals and lay actors, we analyze lived experiences of interaction in three fields of diaconal and ecclesiastical practice: (1) parish life, (2) diaconal culture, and (3) agencies providing low-threshold services. We focus on how actors construct and mobilize "the religious" as an orientation for religious as well as innerworldly action. Conceptually, the paper adopts a Bourdieusian approach to religious practice, treating religious communication as embedded in struggles over legitimacy and symbolic capital. We

argue that "the religious" functions as a battlefield of meaning-making: actors deploy it to negotiate professional roles, organizational expectations, and boundaries of belonging. By mapping these competing rationalities across arenas, the paper contributes to current debates on the transformation of Protestantism under conditions of pluralization and organizational stress.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 81: Wojciech Białecki** – Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin  
*Critique of Religion and Critical Religion: Heraclitan Perspective on Greek Orthopraxy*

Widely known for his tendency of relentless critique, Heraclitus did not stop at attacking figures of moral and cultural authority of his time only – he also targeted various aspects of culture, which we now recognise as "religious", such as statue worship, ritual cleansing or processions. Indeed, various fragments provide evidence of Heraclitus's negative attitude towards customary religious practices, highlighting their inadequacy, which prompted a discussion on Heraclitus's view on religion. Certainly the accusatory tone of the fragments, at the first glance, paints us a picture of a disillusioned sceptic, who cannot accept the irrational nature of the practices he had chosen to depict. My goal, however, is to show that his critique of ritual practice did not amount to religious scepticism, but posits him as a thinker ingrained in that religious tradition, concerned with orthopraxy and identifying the underlying nature of the sacred. Furthermore, I will argue that certain problems Heraclitus raises, especially in regards to the question of "proper naming", pose him on the periphery of the then existing theological discourse, thus suggesting that he should be understood as taking an unusual position for his time.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 82: Alexander Fedorov** – The University of Hong Kong  
*Hong Kong Schooling and the Governance of Religious Difference: Freedom of Conscience in East & Southeast Asian Perspective*

Freedom of conscience, though less discussed than freedom of religion, is foundational to education—especially when plurality, belief, and governance sit uneasily together. Whereas freedom of religion is protected in international law and often pursued through institutional or group claims, freedom of conscience centres on individual moral autonomy—the right to believe, not believe, or change belief (Trigg, 2010; Maclure & Taylor, 2011). Schools are key sites where these tensions surface through curriculum, governance, and ritual practice. This paper examines how freedom of conscience is configured in postcolonial Hong Kong's school system, where a secular constitutional framework coexists with a dense network of Christian, Buddhist, Taoist, and Islamic sponsoring bodies. Through qualitative analysis of the Basic Law (Arts. 32, 137, 141, 148), the Ethics and Religious Studies curriculum (2007, 2014, 2019, 2024), and selected policy debates, I show how the settlement grants thick protections to religious organisations and to public civility norms, while offering only thin, under-specified safeguards for students' individual conscience. A brief comparison with Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Thailand situates Hong Kong within broader East and Southeast Asian patterns, in which duties, harmony, and "Asian values" often trump the explicit language of refusal, dissent, or non-participation. I argue that bringing freedom of conscience to the centre of analysis clarifies how religious difference is governed in schools and suggests new ways of thinking about ethical pluralism in contemporary Asian societies.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 83: Ingela Visuri** – Dalarna University  
*The Third Man Factor: Sensed Presence at the Boundaries of Religion*

This paper presents findings from a pilot study conducted within the broader research project *Secular Transcendences*, which examines experiences that are phenomenologically religion-like yet articulated in non-religious terms. The study presented examines the so-called "Third Man Factor," widely reported among endurance athletes and adventurers. The phenomenon refers to the felt presence of a perceived social other during extreme physical or psychological strain, often described as supportive or guiding. Drawing on survey data and interviews, the analysis identifies a multidimensional experiential pattern

involving perceived social presence, altered self-experience, and functional guidance. Although typically interpreted in secular or biological terms by experiencers, these accounts closely resemble forms of presence and assistance reported in religious contexts, such as guardian figures or guiding entities. The paper argues that Third Man experiences exemplify "secular transcendences": liminal and meaningful experiences that complicate conventional distinctions between religious and non-religious domains. By examining how similar experiential structures are differently interpreted across contexts, the study contributes to broader discussions on the boundaries of religion and the emergence of religion-like experience in late modern secular environments.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 84: Pavel Horák** – University of Vienna

*Primordial Borders of Occult Nationalism: A Theoretical Framework for Mapping the Relations between Occultism and Nationalism*

Over the past three to four decades, three developments have reshaped scholarship on religion and politics. First, outside the academic study of religion, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have increasingly examined religion in relation to its political dimensions and entanglements. Second, within the academic study of religion, the study of esotericism has emerged since the 1990s as a significant subfield with distinctive historical and methodological approaches. Third, a growing body of research now addresses the relationship between esotericism and politics. Taken together, these trends demonstrate sustained interest in religion, esotericism, and nationalism. Yet the specific relationship between occultism and nationalism remains comparatively under-theorised and lacks a systematic conceptual framework. This paper proposes such a framework by integrating perspectives from esotericism studies and nationalism studies. Drawing on a meta-analysis of existing scholarship, it introduces the concept of the *primordial border*: a symbolic boundary constructed through reference to a timeless and essential core, validated through occult means. The paper argues that occultism and nationalism intersect through their shared emphasis on such a primordial essence. This essence structures seven symbolic elements, which are understood as its expressions and enable the fusion of national and occult worldviews into a unified symbolic configuration. The authority of this synthesis derives from reference to immaterial or esoteric forces (e.g. astral planes, egregores, spiritual archetypes) that sacralise these elements. On this basis, the paper conceptualises occult nationalism as a distinct analytical category with implications for the study of religion and beyond.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 85: Cornelia Niggli** – University of Bern

*Making Sense of Covid-19 and Dealing with Ambiguity in Times of Crisis*

This paper investigates how individuals in Switzerland narrate the COVID-19 pandemic and negotiate the plurality of perspectives that surround it, paying particular attention to the use of religious semantic. The pandemic amplified social ambiguity, confronting individuals with competing perspectives on public health, civil liberties, and social responsibility. Some described the virus as flu-like, others as deadly; some prioritized protecting the most vulnerable, while others emphasized the economy; some strictly followed government measures, while others allowed flexibility. Against this backdrop, the exploration and comparison of individual narratives shed light on how people manage ambiguity and negotiate social obligations. The paper builds on data from more than 70 qualitative interviews conducted as part of the research project "*How Worldviews Shape Social Responsibility*." In the first step, the paper presents selected results of an inductively derived typology of strategies people employed to handle COVID-related ambiguity. In a second step, it examines the role of religion- or spirituality-related narratives in shaping personal interpretations of the crisis. For example, it explores how references to principles such as charity or communal responsibility were used to support or justify individual stances and decisions.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 86: Audrius Beinorius** – Vilnius University

*Rajiv Malhotra and His War Against Western "Hinduphobia": Civilizational Apologetics and the Contestation of Religious Knowledge*

Rajiv Malhotra, founder of the Infinity Foundation, has become one of the most vocal critics of Western academic scholarship on Hinduism. I shall examine his works as a significant intervention in contemporary debates over the academic study of Hinduism. Through close analysis of *Breaking India* (2011), *Being Different* (2011), and *Indra's Net* (2014), the paper argues that Malhotra's critique of Western scholarship — framed through the category of "Hinduphobia" — constitutes a form of civilizational apologetics that challenges the epistemological foundations of modern religious studies. The public controversy surrounding his sustained campaign against Wendy Doniger and Sheldon Pollock serves as a focal case illustrating how methodological disagreement becomes reframed as moral injury and civilizational hostility. Engaging theoretical insights from Talal Asad, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Russell T. McCutcheon, presentation situates Malhotra's work within broader debates on the genealogy of "religion," the politics of classification, and the relationship between scholarship and power. I ask: What does the rhetoric of "Hinduphobia" reveal about contemporary tensions between confessional commitments and critical scholarship? How does Malhotra's critique intersect with global calls to decolonize religious studies? I argue that while Malhotra appropriates elements of postcolonial critique, he resolves them through civilizational essentialism and epistemic incommensurability. The result is a model of insider sovereignty that places significant pressure on the comparative and critical ambitions of religious studies. The controversy over "Hinduphobia" thus reveals not merely a dispute over Hindu interpretation, but a structural transformation in the global politics of religious knowledge.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 87: Gintarė Lukoševičiūtė** – Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius

*From Mosque to Home: Communal and Individual Lifestyle Negotiations in the Lithuanian Muslim Community*

This paper analyzes how Muslim lifestyle in Lithuania is reflected in two interrelated spaces: the mosque and home. It examines how the boundaries between the sacred and profane, between communal and private religious life, are negotiated in everyday life. The study, which focuses mainly on the period from 1990 to the present, argues that the contemporary Muslim way of life is shaped by ongoing interaction between institutional religious structures and domestically embedded practices grounded in historical experience. The study is ethnographic, based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Historically, Islam in Lithuania was closely associated with the Lithuanian Tatars. During the interwar period, religious life operated within officially recognized Tatars' communal structures. Under Soviet rule, however, public religious activity was restricted, and practices were largely transferred to the private sphere. Rituals and ethical norms were maintained primarily within households, rooted in ethnic traditions and family memory. This domestication of religion significantly influenced post-1990 patterns of religious revival. Following independence, renewed institutionalization through mosques, religious organizations, and transnational ties (particularly with Turkish state and non-state actors), reintroduced normative models of Islamic knowledge and moral discipline. As the community became increasingly multi-ethnic, these models were selectively adopted, negotiated, or contested. By examining life-cycle rituals, Ramadan observance, and everyday moral practices, this research demonstrates that communal settings emphasize regulation and collective belonging. Meanwhile, household practices reveal distinctive adaptations shaped by Soviet period, ethnic traditions, generational differences, current transnational influences, contributing to broader debates on Islam and Muslim minority religious life in contemporary Europe.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 89: Alessandro Giudice** – Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

*Beyond Judicium Dei: Hindu Ordeal Between Judicial Authority and Ritual Efficacy*

The Hindu ordeal (Skt. *divya*) occupies an uneasy position at the intersection of juridical rationality and religious practice. Building on and revising modern interpretations (Derrett 1978; Lariviere 1981, 1991;

Brick 2010; Wiese 2016), this paper argues that a specifically ritual analysis clarifies both the continuance and the practical plausibility of Hindu ordeals. Drawing also on comparative reflections on the rituality behind judicial procedure (Moore 1975; Chase 2005), I show how Sanskrit legal texts (*Dharmaśāstra*) configure ordeals through standardised sequences, constrained mantra speech, sacral space-time, and a lexicon of purification (śuddhi). The decisive contribution, however, concerns ritual roles embedded within the ordeal. A careful reading of late first-millennium *Dharmaśāstra* sources—especially the *Pitāmahasmṛti*, recently reconstructed by Giudice (2026)—uncovers a Vedic sub-structure within the ordeal: the chief judge (Skt. *prāḍvivāka*) is explicitly compared to the Vedic "material" officiant (Skt. *adhvaryu*), while the king is cast as the patron (Skt. *yajamāna*), bestowing gifts for sacrificial services (Skt. *dakṣiṇā*) and accruing merit when the rite is properly carried out. From this perspective, the manipulability emphasised by Wiese (2016) is structurally functional: to secure the rite's successful completion—and thus its benefits for the royal patron—officials had strong incentives to manage outcomes. I therefore propose reading the Hindu ordeal as a legal institution enshrouded in sacrificial form, whose intrinsic manipulability by its officiants constitutes a structural condition of its ritual efficacy and social acceptability.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 92: Maria Niță** – The Open University, London

*Ritual in the Secular and Religious Networks of the British Climate Movement*

The paper presents a historical and anthropological account of the climate movement in the UK, looking at its roots and influences as well as its growing, transnational, European climate networks and cultures. The British Climate Movement brings together a diverse spectrum of secular and religious networks, including Extinction Rebellion, Red Rebels, Just Stop Oil, and Christian Climate Action, among other wider and intersecting transnational movements, such as Transition Towns and the Fridays for Future school strikes movement. This paper aims to provide a scholarly examination of these contemporary networks and cultures, with attention to their religious, artistic and performative dimensions. It draws on my ongoing longitudinal research into the Climate Movement (2007-present) in the UK, as well as new scholarly perspectives and theoretical frameworks in the investigation of ritual, protest art and performance. By undertaking an analysis of these key dimensions of the climate movement, my research examines the movement's relationships and assemblages: as responses to new interconnected contemporary global challenges, such as armed conflict and health, as well as the intersectionality of modern inequalities in connection with gender, race, and migration. My paper will therefore discuss the secular and religious networks of the British Climate Movement through the prism of its material culture, employing a semiotic analysis of its ritualised, artistic and performative protest actions.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 94: Eva Lindhardt** – Aarhus University / University College Copenhagen

*Controversies in the Classroom: Strengthening Students' Religious Literacy by Teaching Controversial Issues in Religious Education*

Teaching controversial issues aims to foster students' religious literacy by promoting an understanding of diversity in society (Hess, 2009) and within and among different religions (Iversen, 2020). Another aim is to encourage critical reflection on personal prejudices and stereotypes (Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). However, in increasingly polarised societies, discussing controversial issues can pose risks, as disagreements may lead to conflict or reinforce existing stereotypes. This paper explores how teaching controversial issues in religious education (RE) can improve students' religious literacy (Moore, 2006) by emphasising exploratory talks and multiperspectivity when addressing controversies at the intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life. Simultaneously, it underscores the importance of teachers being attentive to how these controversies may affect students in various ways, particularly regarding minority and majority perspectives (Dillinger, 2025; Flensner & Lippe, 2019). Based on classroom observations of students' conversations on controversial issues in two lower-secondary RE classes (grade

8-9), the paper examines and discusses the possibilities and challenges of strengthening students' literacy through RE by teaching controversial issues.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 95: Caterina Luzi** – University of Milano Bicocca

*Reconfiguring the Sacred: Contemporary Art, Religion, and Spiritual Experience in Museums*

This essay explores the ways in which contemporary art helps to reinterpret the sacred in European museums. By "sacred," I do not refer to a specific religious category, but rather deeper meanings that manifest through things, images, rituals, and places and can inspire introspection, emotional engagement, or a sense of belonging. According to this viewpoint, the sacred is not something that is predetermined; rather, it develops via interactions between individuals, works of art, and the environments in which they are found (Morgan, 2017). The reflections presented here are part of a broader anthropological research project on contemporary art and its relationship with religion and spirituality in secularized societies. During a visiting research period at the Museum Catharijneconvent in Utrecht, the Dutch national museum of Christian art and heritage, I conducted a focused case study that informs this contribution. I examined the exhibition *In the Name of Love*, which contrasts historical and modern pieces to examine devotion, charity, passion, and suffering. Through participant observation, qualitative interviews with visitors, and in-depth conversations with selected contemporary artists whose practices engage explicitly with religious themes, I analysed both the reception and the production of meaning. This dual perspective allows me to explore how religious and spiritual imaginaries are negotiated not only in the interpretive experience of audiences, religious and non-religious alike, but also in the artistic processes that reinterpret Christian symbols, narratives, and affective registers within a secular cultural framework. The article places this case in the context of larger changes that have altered both religion and art since the 20th century. Spiritual experience has moved away from collective doctrinal frameworks toward more individualized and embodied forms due to the growing distinction between artistic and ecclesiastical institutions as well as the "subjective turn" in Western culture (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). However, religious imagery, symbols, and spaces are still used in contemporary artistic practices, frequently being recontextualized outside of their original ritual contexts (Meyer, 2019). The study intends to demonstrate how contemporary art functions as a mediating tool for the renegotiating of the sacred in public cultural contexts by analysing these dynamics. Thus, museums become places of encounter where existential inquiry and aesthetic experience meet, enabling the emergence of new kinds of collective reflection that transcend confessional boundaries.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 96: Tara Monet Falce** – University of Latvia, Riga

*Punishment and Paradise: Exploring the Influence of Supernatural Punishment Theory in Islam: The Case Study of Adultery*

The omnipresent God and process of punishment and reward in the afterlife has been explored in Christianity and Judaism in a multitude of perspectives to understand the believers' thoughts and actions in reaching salvation. However, within the Abrahamic religions, it seems little research has been employed to understand the process of punishment and reward in Islam through the cognitive science of religion. With this established, how does supernatural punishment theory influence pro-social behavior in Islamic societies to avoid the punishments of hell? This research explores supernatural punishment theory in modern Islam through a textual and qualitative analysis. For the scope of this inquiry, the research limits itself to exploring adultery in Islam; since it falls under *hudud*. This means adultery is a violation against God and disrupts the social structure of the *Umma*, Muslim Community. Indicating that adultery transgresses the supernatural and natural norms of the *Umma*. The primary text that is employed in this research is Muhammad's Nocturnal Journey, the Qur'an, Hadiths, and Sunnah, and present-day laws that have influenced present-day deterrents from committing adultery and experiencing supernatural punishments. The results of this inquiry have indicated that the effectiveness of supernatural punishment theory through the analysis of Muhammad's Nocturnal Journey, Qur'an,

Hadiths, and Sunnah has influenced regulated measures and third-party punishment. Regulated measures range from a common consensus among societal and religious norms of self-regulation and acceptance of sexual relations through marriage as a deterrent to adultery. However, the latter regulated measures have led to disproportionate punishment against women, with honor killings being a prime example of such when it comes to the social consequences of adultery in Islam.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 97: Lars Nilsson** – Stockholm University

*Sacralization of the Ordinary: An Ethnographic Study of Tarot Reading in Secular Public Spaces in Stockholm, Sweden*

This paper presents an ongoing ethnographic study of tarot reading as practiced in secular and semi-public environments in Stockholm, Sweden. Rather than approaching tarot as a system of belief or esoteric doctrine, the project investigates tarot reading as a situated social and ritualized practice that unfolds in everyday urban contexts such as bars, bookstores, and other publicly accessible spaces. The study explores how meaning, reflection, and forms of personal orientation are produced through the structured interaction between tarot readers and participants, regardless of whether those involved identify the practice as religious. Empirically, the project is based on qualitative interviews with tarot practitioners and individuals who receive readings, combined with participant observation of reading situations. As the research is still in progress, the paper focuses on preliminary analytical directions rather than definitive conclusions. Particular attention is given to processes of ritualization: how ordinary interactions are temporally and spatially marked as distinct events, how material objects and gestures contribute to the framing of the encounter, and how participants articulate the value of the experience within a broader secular social environment. Theoretically, the study engages with scholarship on ritualization and lived religion to examine how forms of sacral meaning may emerge outside institutional religious structures. By analysing tarot reading in contemporary Stockholm, the project contributes to discussions on urban spirituality, non-institutional religiosity, and the shifting boundaries between the sacred and the secular in late modern Europe.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 98: Maja Román** – Stockholm University

*Formative but Not Uniform? Missionary Service and Narrative Trajectories Among Swedish Latter-day Saints*

Missionary service in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) is institutionally framed as a priesthood duty for young men and an optional path for young women, although increasing numbers of women now choose to serve as missionaries. In research, mission service in the LDS Church is commonly described as a formative religious experience and a mechanism for socialization and long-term commitment building. This paper examines how such assumptions hold in a highly secular Swedish context by asking how missionary service is retrospectively constructed and negotiated by returned missionaries, and how it may lead to divergent trajectories of religious commitment. The study draws on in-depth interviews with Swedish returned missionaries who served foreign missions between 2014 and 2024. The material includes both men and women, as well as individuals who remain active in the LDS Church and those who have become inactive. Using a narrative approach, the paper situates missionary service as embedded in a longer process of religious formation, from early socialization and the decision to serve, to the lived experience of the mission and its retrospective significance for religious commitment. By comparing missionary narratives, the paper explores how missionary service can function both as a strengthening of religious commitment and as a site of negotiation and change. The study contributes to discussions of religious formation, lived religion, and the non-linear relationship between intensive religious practice and long-term commitment.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 99: Enrique Santos Marinas** – University Complutense of Madrid

*Reflection of Slavic Myths in Social Networks and Mass Media on the Verge of a Resurgence of Slavic Neopagan Religion*

This paper explores the contemporary resurgence of Slavic neopagan religion and examines how Slavic myths are reinterpreted, reconstructed, and disseminated through social networks and mass media. Drawing on examples from platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, Telegram, as well as forum social media platform like Reddit, the study analyzes how mythological figures are reframed in visual culture, memes, digital art, and influencer discourse. The research argues that digital media function not merely as channels of transmission but as active spaces of myth-making, where fragmented historical sources are blended with nationalist narratives, popular fantasy aesthetics, and global neopagan trends. In mass media productions—ranging from documentaries to historical dramas—mythological motifs are often stylized, romanticized, or politicized, contributing to a hybrid cultural field that oscillates between scholarship, spirituality, and popular culture. The paper situates these developments within broader theories of religious revival, identity construction, and mediatization. It demonstrates that the algorithmic logic of social networks amplifies emotionally charged and visually symbolic content, thereby strengthening myth-based identity markers among users. Ultimately, the resurgence of Slavic neopaganism is shown to be inseparable from contemporary media ecologies, in which myth operates as a flexible symbolic resource for negotiating heritage, authenticity, and belonging in the digital age.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 100: Douglas Mattsson** – Malmö University

*Imagining Tengri: Conceptualizing and Contesting the Pre-Islamic Past in Contemporary Turkey*

Tengrism, the worship of the "Eternal Blue Sky", is considered one of the oldest belief systems in human history — serving as the spiritual backbone for the Great Steppe civilizations, including the Xiongnu, the Göktürks, and the Mongols. This paper explores the modern revival of such beliefs in the emerging neo-Tengri milieu in Turkey. The paper primarily explores its appearance in contemporary Turkish popular culture, analyzing Tengrism as a flexible signifier for renegotiations of identity, nationhood, and resistance within an authoritarian Islamist Turkey. Originating among ancient Turkic and Mongol groups, Tengrism centered on the worship of the sky god Tengri and other deities like Umay and Erlik (Isaacs). As the Turkic and Mongol tribes expanded, Tengrism was locally negotiated and interpreted, leading to a plethora of conceptualizations of Tengrism. Therefore, Tengrism has been understood as both monotheistic and polytheistic, accommodating various political and cultural contexts. In Turkey, Tengrism has commonly been conceptualized as monotheistic and in harmony with Islam. However, recent popular culture products increasingly contest this framing. This paper will suggest that we might be in need to refine prevailing interpretations of contemporary Turkish identity struggles that are often organized around a "secularist" versus "Islamist" binary by investigating how pre-Islamic religious imaginaries may function as a third religious-political repertoire through which actors negotiate nationhood, heritage, and spiritual orientation in an increasingly Islamist public sphere.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 101: Eileen Groth Lyon** – The State University of New York at Fredonia

*The Ambiguous Role of Wehrmacht Chaplains Serving in Nazi Prisons*

In Nazi-occupied areas, existing prison staff were often replaced with Germans on the basis that they might collaborate with their compatriots who were arrested for underground activities. This was true of prison chaplains as well. German Wehrmacht chaplains were appointed in their stead. It was unquestionably an awkward arrangement. Prisoners had difficulty trusting these "enemy soldiers," and chaplains were torn between loyalty to the Reich and military discipline and Christian commitment to those to whom they ministered. The activities of three Catholic chaplains — Franz Stock, Theodore Loevenich, and Otto Gramann — will be considered in this paper. Stock and Loevenich served in Fresnes, La Santé, and Cherche-Midi prisons in the Paris area. Gramann served as the Wehrmacht chaplain general in Belgium and Northern France and in the prison at Liège and the Breendonk internment camp. All three chaplains were remembered with affection by many who survived these prisons and by the families of those executed. In addition to providing spiritual and emotional support, they defied prison regulations in supplying prisoners with contraband and extra food, passing secret

messages between prisoners and their families, and remaining in contact with bereaved families. Yet, they remained complicit with the Nazi regime in attending hundreds of executions, even taking part in tying the condemned to the posts in preparation for their executions by firing squad. There is no evidence that they ever voiced objection to any of these executions, even when the victims were innocent hostages. Indeed, the chaplains stood ready to support the executioners.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 102: Amelia Robertson Brown** – Macquarie University

*Make Love AND War: The Cult of Armed Aphrodite of Acrocorinth in Context as a Civic Protector Goddess of Corinth over 700 Years*

Cults of civic protector gods were central to the religion of ancient Greece, and in Roman times. Nowhere was this more so than Aphrodite for Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic 'Wealthy' Corinth, and for her Roman successor colony. Armed (*Hoplismene*) Aphrodite Ourania was worshipped atop Acrocorinth with a view of the Isthmus embodied in statue form, and housed in her own temple there, from at least the seventh century BCE into Late Antiquity of the 4th or 5th c. She was prayed to as a civic patron of her people's love, war and money making: a protector, savior and defender goddess of her city's merchants, mariners, warriors, farmers, courtesans, craftsmen and indeed entire population. Armed Aphrodite Ourania's cults, statues and context at Corinth can be reconstructed only from fragments now, however, and in broad historical phases, as created, experienced and sometimes recorded by literate viewers, or by the artists who crafted her images in stone, clay or metals. Ancient Corinthians and others reshaped her physical images, iconography, and local significance, whether in large or small scale, but they clearly also remained very devoted to her, giving her gifts and prayers in their concern to retain her civic and personal protection over more than seven centuries. This paper reaches back to Pindar and forward to Pausanias, mixing long-known literary texts with new finds of terracotta figurines and marble statuettes of Corinthian Aphrodites (and Venuses), to yield new insights into her cults, temples and statues, especially for her Corinthian, maritime and visiting worshippers.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 103: Muhammad Adiz Wasisto** – University of Vienna / Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta

*Performing the "Just Ruler": Jokowi's Javanese Political Theatrics, *blusukan*, and the Re-Enchantment of Presidential Authority*

In October 2014, *Time* magazine featured Jokowi on its cover with the headline "A New Hope," signifying the millenarian hope for a prosperous Indonesia and the longing for a just, civilian-led government after decades of a traumatic period under military authoritarianism. Jokowi's media image did not emerge in a vacuum; it mirrored deliberate image-making strategies that cast him as a champion of the people through performative political display. Millenarian symbolism runs through his performative politics, evident in his tacit validation of supporters' claims that he is the promised Just Ruler (*Ratu Adil*) and in his impromptu, door-to-door visits to slum neighbourhoods (*blusukan*), which together cultivate an image of authentic justice and a "divinely inspired" leader long awaited by Indonesians. This study examines Jokowi's political showmanship and digital mediation of his image in using millenarian symbol of Javanese *Ratu Adil* myth to reinforce presidential authority and shift to legal-rational authority to older charismatic authority. This study employs qualitative critical discourse analysis of digital media and Jokowi's campaign materials, interpreted through Weberian authority framework. This study argues that Jokowi mediatized his political theatrics through his *blusukan* method and *Ratu Adil* cues which function as strategic millenarian signifiers that convert his populist authenticity into charismatic legitimacy, subtly reconfiguring Indonesia's presidential authority beyond a purely legal-rational basis.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 104: Frederik Wallenstein** – Stockholm University

*"Trolls" in Early Modern Sweden: An Elusive Sphere of Belief and Practice*

This paper examines the concept of "troll" as it appears in some Swedish sources from the early modern period, with particular emphasis on the earlier part of this period (the 16th and 17th centuries). These sources are sparse and heterogeneous in character. They are of considerable interest, yet upon closer inspection perhaps more difficult to interpret than has previously been assumed. On the one hand, it seems that the concept of the "troll" and beliefs associated with it were very much alive in early modern Sweden. On the other hand, it remains difficult to determine what people in the late sixteenth and early 17th centuries more precisely imagined when speaking of a "troll." In comparison with medieval sources and the considerably later folkloristic material, the early modern evidence is limited and difficult to analyse, especially in light of the significant differences between these two other bodies of material. From a diachronic perspective, the question thus arises of how the early modern conceptions should be situated in relation to these other sources, and from a synchronic perspective, of how they can be contextualized in their own time. This, in turn, provides a kind of microhistorical entry point for discussing the religious dynamics of the early modern period.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 106: Marie Glasø Glein** – Volda University College  
*Yoga in Schools*

For several years, yoga has been taught in classrooms worldwide. Research has documented the practice in especially English-speaking countries and India. In Norway, yoga has entered schools partly via resource materials produced for schoolteachers. Mindfulness and yoga in schools are in this material often linked to the curriculum's emphasis on health and life skills. This topic is meant to run through the entire curriculum for all ages. The political support for life mastery and wellbeing in Norwegian school is not just found in the curriculum; it is also backed by broader health promotion policies. Education and health are thus connected by an integrated policy aimed at helping young people to learn to master life. As yoga is increasingly used as health intervention in the classroom, the need for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon grows. This paper takes a closer look at teaching materials aimed at teachers in Norwegian schools to examine how ideas and language from therapeutic culture and wellness spirituality are incorporated into school focused yoga resources. Drawing on concepts from the field of therapeutic culture, the material is analysed to answer the research question: How does books and teaching materials on yoga in schools draw on and reproduce ideas, language and discourses from wellness spirituality and therapeutic culture? And to what extent do these discourses align with the curriculum? The practical and ethical implications of introducing commercialised wellness practices into the school system will also be addressed.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 108: Giovanni Franceschini** – University of Modena and Reggio Emilia  
*Franciscanism and Fascist Civil Religion: Catholic Symbolic Power and the Early Sacralization of Politics in Italy (Umbria, 1926)*

This paper investigates the interaction between Catholicism and Fascism in the making of Italian national identity by focusing on the 1926 seventh centenary of the death of St Francis of Assisi. Treated here as an early "laboratory" of symbolic negotiation rather than a fully developed totalitarian spectacle, the centenary offers a privileged case to analyse how Catholic devotional traditions could be politically re-signified in the formative years of the regime. The analysis is grounded in the historiography on Fascism as political religion and on the sacralization of politics (Emilio Gentile), but keeps Catholicism and Franciscanism at the centre of the inquiry: not merely as "resources" exploited by Fascism, but as institutional and ritual fields where meanings were contested, translated, and stabilized. The paper asks how Francis—already a powerful figure of Italian Catholic identity—was mobilized to articulate a national narrative of moral renewal and collective regeneration, and how this process fostered hierarchical imaginaries (including racialized and civilizational oppositions) that helped frame Italians as legitimate "Mediterranean" agents rather than violent conquerors. Sources include diocesan and Franciscan archives, liturgical programmes, local Umbrian Catholic press, public commemorations, and political-cultural rhetoric surrounding the centenary. By combining local-scale evidence with a history-

of-religions approach, the paper contributes to comparative debates on civil religion, political ritual, and the entanglement of Catholicism and authoritarian nationalism in twentieth-century Europe.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 109 : Olof Sundqvist – Stockholm University**

*Popular Religious Practice and the Sacred Landscape in Medieval Scandinavia: Indigenous Legacy or Christian Innovation?*

Previous research on the medieval cult of St. Erik in Sweden has often claimed that it replaced pre-Christian sacrificial practices at Old Uppsala. According to the antiquarian Knut Stjerna, Erik was the direct successor of the fertility god Freyr: when people sought good harvests and healthy offspring among both animals and humans, they turned to Erik in the Middle Ages just as they had worshipped Freyr in the Viking Age. In recent years, such arguments have been viewed with greater skepticism. For example, the historian Anders Fröjmark has pointed out significant problems with Stjerna's hypothesis, noting that the cult of saints was largely imported into Scandinavia from continental Europe as a ready-made package. Fröjmark's position is reasonable, yet in the case of the Erik cult it is difficult to dismiss the evidence for adaptation to local and indigenous conditions. In my paper, I highlight sources indicating continuities between pre-Christian religion and popular piety in the Lake Mälaren region, where ecclesiastical actors incorporated non-Christian symbols and adapted them to Christian worship. My hypothesis is that these symbols were meaningful because they were tied to the traditional significance of particular places, and above all to the deeply rooted folk customs of the local agrarian society. The aim of the presentation is to demonstrate the presence of indigenous agency in the early formation of Christian piety—showing that not only foreign missionaries but also the Norsemen themselves were active producers, rather than merely passive recipients, of religion.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 110: Martin Lavička – Palacký University Olomouc**

*In the Name of Patriotism: Regulating Religions under the Xi Jinping Regime*

This presentation examines the tightening regulation of religion in the People's Republic of China under Xi Jinping, focusing on the convergence of patriotic education, national security, and religious governance. It argues that the current phase of regulation extends beyond administrative oversight and constitutes a normative redefinition of religion through the language of patriotism, national unity, and Party leadership. Drawing on primary sources, including recent regulations issued by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), revisions to the Regulations on Religious Affairs, and the 2024 Patriotic Education Law, the presentation traces how legal codification has institutionalized loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party within the governance of religious communities. Particular attention is paid to the legal construction of "Sinicization" (*zhongguohua*), the role of the United Front system, and the expansion of patriotic education into religious institutions, seminaries, and digital platforms. Methodologically, the paper combines doctrinal legal analysis with discourse analysis of official texts. It situates recent developments within broader debates on rule by law, ideological security, and the Party-state's strategy of governing religion through law. By foregrounding legal texts as instruments of political authority, the paper demonstrates how patriotism operates simultaneously as a legitimizing narrative and a regulatory mechanism. The study will contribute to ongoing discussions on authoritarian legality, state-religion relations, and the global implications of China's evolving governance model.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 111: Robin Timothy Funck – Stockholm University**

*Continuity of Gnosis*

Drawing on earlier research on gnosis in the Nag Hammadi Codices, this paper examines gnosis within Sethian and Valentinian traditions as a continuity of phenomenon within Gnostic traditions. Using a comparative discourse analysis of selected Nag Hammadi texts with explicit engagement with the discourse of gnosis, the paper traces how salvific knowledge is narratively framed, authorised, and

transmitted across different Gnostic traditions. Rather than the classic scholarly approach of Gnostic scripture through system-level reconstructions or strict document analysis, this study adopts a less common phenomenological and micro-level analytical perspective. Discussing gnosis in terms of its theoretical and narrative framework, claims and sources of authority, articulation, and content of doctrine, the paper aims to highlight both shared features and distinctive developments within Sethian and Valentinian traditions. By focusing on the articulation and discourse of gnosis, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions in the history of religions by reviewing gnosis not as a fixed doctrinal system but as a dynamic and evolving feature across related Gnostic schools of thought.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER II5: Evelyn Reuter** – University of Graz

*Engineering the Religious Diversity in Albania: Actors, Inclusion, and Exclusion in the Interreligious Council*

This paper explores the role of the Interreligious Council of Albania (ICA) as a key agent of religious engineering in a society redefining its religious landscape after decades of state atheism. Drawing on the concept of "religious engineering", the study analyses how the state, the ICA, and faith communities act as "engineers" of interreligious dialogue and religious coexistence. It asks: What visions for society are articulated and pursued through the ICA? Who has access to participation, and who remains excluded, despite the country's rhetorical commitment to "harmony and tolerance"? Empirically, the study focuses on several religious communities with different degrees of involvement in or exclusion from the ICA, including the Catholic Church, the Bahá'í, and Sufi orders. The analysis addresses both internal negotiations and exclusions within the ICA and the transnational dimensions, such as the role of religious networks and their centers (e.g. the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa) and Albania's EU ongoing accession process. Special attention is paid to legal and institutional frameworks that regulate religious authority, recognition, and the boundaries of participation in interfaith dialogue. Based on ongoing fieldwork, the paper explores how engineering practices reflect and reconfigure Albania's religious field, especially through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in interfaith dialogue. Preliminary observations suggest that, despite the rhetoric of "harmony and tolerance", religious engineering within the ICA (re-)produces hierarchies and marginalizes certain groups. Thus, the case provides nuanced insights into the contingencies of religious diplomacy and engineering in a still under-researched post-socialist context.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER II7: Tadeáš Vala** – Charles University, Prague

*Revisiting the Reconquista: Post-Truth Historiography and the Resurgence of a Medieval Narrative in Conservative Academia and Contemporary Islamophobic Discourse*

Historically, the contrasting paradigms of an eight-hundred-year Christian Reconquista and a tolerant interfaith *Convivencia* were both systematically deconstructed and rejected within rigorous academic scholarship for their ideological and teleological simplifications. However, the twenty-first century is witnessing a virulent resurgence of the Reconquista narrative. Addressing the EASR 2026 theme "Religions 360°" concerning the public production and defence of knowledge, this contribution examines how the debunked Reconquista model is being actively resurrected. This phenomenon is not confined to public discourse; it spans both conservative academic circles, particularly in Spain, and the broader transnational, often Anglophone, Islamophobic milieu. Fuelled by anti-immigrant anxieties, contemporary conservative scholars and lay activists reframe medieval interreligious relations to legitimize modern xenophobia. Crucially, these actors weaponize the academic critique of the *Convivencia* myth, presenting it as proof of an inherent bias, manipulation, and left-wing tendentiousness within the academic establishment. By doing so, they seek to restore the epistemological authority of the *Reconquista* as a transhistorical civilizational struggle. This contribution analyses how these authors interpret medieval interreligious relationships using a heavily criticized framework. Ultimately, it explores the dialogic tension between empirical historical research and the ideologically driven consumption of religious history, questioning how scholars of religion and history can effectively

defend their ongoing research and counter the manipulation of medieval narratives in today's eruptive, post-truth knowledge environments.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 121: Joanna Malita-Król** – Jagiellonian University, Kraków

*Many Layers of Making the Motanka Doll. Heritage, Magic, and Womanhood in the Context of Material Religion*

*Motanki*, rag dolls which carry certain intentions, are created on the crossroads of Slavic material heritage, magical practices, and folk culture. Originating from doll talismans and amulets, *motanki* have come a long journey, being used not only in the context of folk magic but also as artefacts made as a part of the therapeutic process, warfare talismans, and expression of female heritage. They can be prepared on different occasions, from marking the rites of passage to protection and bringing good fortune. The making of *motanka* dolls has become increasingly popular in Poland recently, as proved by the rising number of *motanka*-making workshops, online courses, and content published both on social media and in book form. In this paper I will analyse three particular aspects of making the *motanka* doll in contemporary Poland: the preservation of heritage, the practice of folk magic, and the expression of (sacred) womanhood. Following the material religion research paradigm (e.g., Morgan 2010, Apostolos-Cappadona 2016), I argue that *motanka* dolls can materialise those aspects in the everyday life of their creators, including supporting their relationship with the sacred (Primiano 2016). I will analyse the process of making the *motanka* doll and the functions it performs for its maker, showing that those three themes can be intertwined, or a particular creator can focus on just one of them. My argument is based on field research, especially participant observation during *motanka*-making workshops and interviews with creators who offer making *motanka* dolls for others and/or conduct 'do-it-yourself' workshops.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 122: Adela Toplean** – University of Bucharest

*Rewiring Spiritual Power: What We Study When We Study Digital Religion among Orthodox Romanians*

This paper uses Romanian Orthodox digital practices to propose a model for studying religion at the intersection of social phenomenology, death studies, and digital studies, linking the traditional horizon of Orthodox Romanians to their digital practices. Drawing on Alfred Schütz's phenomenology of social relations and recent applications to online interaction, I examine Facebook groups dedicated to healing saints such as Saint John the Russian and Saint Nektarios of Aegina. In these groups, digital icons and testimonies of miraculous interventions reconfigure spiritual power at the intersection of religious authority, intimate care, and platform logics. Three ideal-typical clusters emerge from my fieldwork: (1) a realm of belief where faith, untroubled by its digital mediation, "decodes" suffering across online and offline lifeworlds; (2) ambivalent users who feel partially at home in either Orthodox tradition or digital cultures; and (3) actors for whom electronic proximity reorganises death and faith, following different principles. Although digital technologies modulate ritual practice and social support more than core beliefs do, these shifts redistribute agency among humans, saints, icons, and platforms. By treating these practices as *a single relational field*, the paper argues that the study of religion must become epistemically and methodologically porous to adjacent fields analysing everyday digital and non-digital lifeworlds that mirror, reshape, and generate new ways of relating to suffering. Romanian Orthodoxy offers a concrete case for reimagining how traditional sensibilities, embodied vulnerability, and socio-technical infrastructures can be jointly analysed to grasp new forms of religious behaviour in 21st-century Europe.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 123: Andreas Nordberg** – Stockholm University

*"He Stood Beneath the Battle-standard". A Reinterpretation of Some Stanzas from the Old Norse Poem Hákonarmál*

In my presentation, I will offer an interpretation of a passage from the Old Norse skaldic poem *Hákonarmál*. Composed in the mid-tenth century by the poet Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir, the poem survives only through quotations in later Norwegian kings' sagas. Set within a religious framework, it describes a battle between two Viking armies at Fitjar on the Norwegian island of Stord. On one side stands King Hákon the Good; on the other, his nephews. The Norwegian crown is at stake. The poem begins by placing the historical events in a mythic context: the war-god Odin dispatches his valkyries to select the warriors destined to fall and be received into Valhøll. The armies then array themselves on the battlefield. King Hákon stands beneath his battle-standard. He then casts off his armour onto the ground and *lék við ljóðmogu* — a phrase in Old Norse conventionally rendered as "joked with his men," but which, on contextual grounds, merits re-evaluation. Norse poetry frequently contains such enigmatic elements. Though cryptic to modern readers, these concise allusions may refer to well-known cultural phenomena of the poet's time, which contemporary audiences were expected to recognize without explanation. For us, such details thus serve as clues capable of revealing broader cultural and religious contexts. Drawing on these premises, I propose an alternative interpretation of the stanzas in question. I will argue that both King Hákon's discarding of his armour and the ambiguous *lék við ljóðmogu* can be understood within the broader framework of Germanic and Scandinavian warrior culture.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 125: Ine Bratsvedal** – Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education and University of Inland, Trondheim  
*Neutrality and Normativity: Studying Religion in Educational Contexts*

This paper reflects on tensions between ideals of scholarly neutrality in the study of religion (McCutcheon 1997) and research conducted in normatively structured social fields. It draws on a PhD project based on participatory action research (Kindon *et al.* 2010) in Norwegian kindergartens. The Norwegian Framework Plan for Kindergartens establishes that religion and religious diversity should be acknowledged in kindergarten practice and promotes values such as equality and equity. This raises questions about educational practice, but also about how the study of religion positions itself when engaging with such contexts. Perspectives from the study of religion inform Norwegian early childhood teacher education and shape how religion is presented and approached. Early childhood education, however, is not a neutral arena for knowledge transmission. Kindergartens operate within a mandate of formation (*Bildung*), where encounters with cultural and religious diversity aim both to foster understanding of others and support children's identity development. Religion thus becomes part of processes of identity formation and recognition rather than a purely descriptive field of knowledge. In this setting, institutional claims of neutrality may align with a secular framework historically shaped by Lutheran majority culture. What appears neutral may therefore reflect majority perspectives, recognizing some children's experiences while positioning others at the margins. The paper explores tensions between scholarly neutrality in the study of religion and the normative aims of early childhood education, asking what such contexts imply for how the discipline understands its role and boundaries.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 126: Susana González-Martínez** – University of Helsinki  
*Mapping Creativity, Weaving Knowledge: Unlocking Women's Spirituality in Music through Citizen Science*

This paper will introduce a Marie Skłodowska-Curie research project that explores the relationship between women's spirituality and creativity in popular music. The study methodological approach combines citizen science and the arts, involving female musicians in extreme metal and hip-hop, alongside diverse spiritualities from across the Global North and Global South, who participate as co-creators of knowledge. Findings indicate that women's spirituality is central to their musical identities, shifting the emphasis from what Hargreaves, Miell, and MacDonald (2002) describe as *identity in music*—defined by cultural or social roles—to *music in identity*—conceived as how individuals use music to cultivate other dimensions of the self. Within this perspective, music-making becomes an

ongoing and dynamic spiritual journey for the study participants, highlighting the relevance of spirituality in women's musical identity understanding as relational, processual, and non-essentialist. Similarly, music operates as a spiritual practice that shapes creative processes, reframes artistic aspirations, and advocates for negotiating restrictive religious beliefs. Participants characterise spirituality as a resource for grounding intuitive knowledge and as a values-based framework for circumventing the commercial pressures of the music industry, thereby positioning music alternately as a spiritual refuge and a dialectical form of expression. Collectively, these insights suggest a distinctive and evolving understanding of spirituality among women in popular music, encompassing personal, creative, and socio-political dimensions. In summary, the presentation will emphasise: (1) how combining citizen science with the arts offers innovative approaches for researching spirituality across disciplines, and (2) the role spirituality plays as a relational, affective, and generative dimension of women's creativity.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 127: Jacob F. Tischer** – Charles University Prague

*Technologies of Capture: Dynamics of Immersion and Documentation in Taiwanese Popular Religion*

This paper takes a critical stance regarding the transformative potential of digital technologies in Taiwanese temple festivals. Taiwanese popular religion has a long history of pragmatically incorporating new technologies, but this happens selectively: Devices are successfully integrated into practice to the extent that they further the sensory qualities of what is a fundamentally social experience. To discuss the dynamics of innovation, I attend to the twin concerns of immersion and documentation, both of which are sought after by my interlocutors. In practice, the "technologies of capture" used to enhance features of immersion and documentation do not always align. Immersion and documentation rely on different material media to conjure Alfred Gell's "enchantment of technology": On one hand, immersion operates through techniques that create atmospheric and physical connections with the material bodies of divine beings, such as divination, music, spirit possession, or intimate acts like cleaning the gods. By contrast, the goal of documentation is to preserve detailed images of technologies of enchantment through devices such as smartphones. Because these devices need privileged access to ritual space, they easily disrupt the flow between participants and the material things used to generate immersion. While digital technologies help individuals appreciate virtuosity, the video format creates a mediatized distance. Being hosted on YouTube and Facebook, the immersive potential of technology has to submit to profit-maximizing algorithms, detracting from a lived, social experience. To be incorporated into regular religious practice, digital technologies will instead have to enhance social embeddedness and immersion over abstraction and documentation.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 129: Edith Szanto** – University of Alabama

*Power and Authority in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Kasnazani Order and Political Change*

Sufism has been a central part of the religious and political landscape of Kurdistan since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The proposed paper will historicize the relationship between Sufi authority and state power; then it will examine the transformation of the "performativity" of authority among the Kasnazani Qadiri in Sulaimani over the last half a century. The western part of Iraqi Kurdistan, associated with the tribe of the Barzanis, has traditionally been Naqshbandi, while eastern Iraqi Kurdistan has been Qadiri. There have been two leading Qadiri "shaykhly families": the Talabanis, who have been central to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and the Barzinji, of which the Kasnazani are a sub-branch. There are several Kasnazani lodges, lineages, and shaykhs. The most famous of these was Muhammad 'Abd al-Kareem al-Kasnazani. When he passed away in 2021, more than a hundred thousand devotees came for his funeral from Iran by foot. He was a regionally famous Sufi leader, who also led political protests and whose sons held political offices for the federal government in Baghdad. Yet, when he died and his son Nehro became the next Kasnazani shaykh, much changed. While the father spent his last years in Amman, Jordan, receiving guests in Kurdish clothes, the son wears suits and Sunni Arab attire, lives in Baghdad with his Syrian wife, and has restructured the hierarchy, the presentation, the "look," and the practice of

his Kurdistanian followers. The proposed paper will focus on these changes, thereby examining questions related to political power and saintly authority.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 130: Teemu Pauha** – University of Helsinki

*What is the Knowledge Base of Islamic Studies? Citation Patterns in Flagship Journals, 1990–2026*

Islamic studies has undergone a marked institutional transformation in recent decades, particularly through its increasing incorporation into religious studies departments. This development raises a key question: has the intellectual core of the field changed accordingly? This paper addresses this question through a bibliometric analysis of citation patterns in seven leading Islamic studies journals from 1990 to 2026. The results suggest a notable mismatch between institutional and intellectual change. Both citation distributions and cluster analysis point to a stable division between two ideal types: a traditional history and area studies-oriented profile and a more social science-oriented profile, with a few journals occupying an intermediate position. However, there is little evidence of substantial temporal change in the orientation of the flagship journals themselves. While citations to religious studies literature have increased, the shift is modest, especially in light of the rapid expansion of Islamic studies within religious studies departments. Rather than transforming the core journals of the field, this institutional shift appears to have redirected scholarly output elsewhere. The findings suggest that scholars working on Islam within religious studies are not primarily publishing in flagship Islamic studies journals, but instead in religious studies venues. The recent institutionalization of Islamic studies within religious studies has thus not reconfigured the field's traditional core, but has instead contributed to its partial relocation. Islamic studies, in this sense, is not being transformed from within, but is expanding outward.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 132: Ossi Korpi** – University of Turku

*Narratives of Historical Necessity of New Religion in the Finnish OSE during the First World War*

The Order of the Star in the East (OSE) was an international new religious movement that was preparing for the coming of a "World-Teacher" who would bring forth a new era and "World Religion of the future". Initiated by the second-generation Theosophist in the early 1910s, the Messianic project soon spread across the world. According to the Order, the heralding of the new era was not a one-time event, but rather a recurring historical juncture that reflected spiritual reality. The promoted World-Teacher and accompanying religious unification were presented merely as the next development, preceded by world religions and their "Masters" such as Jesus, Krishna, and Buddha. Previous research has often treated OSE merely as a divisive controversy within Theosophical Society, which came to an end when the order's formal head and the candidate for World-Teacher, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), disbanded the organization in 1929. While it is true that OSE and its dissolution initially caused major disruption within Theosophy and ended in a membership decline, limiting solely to such a perspective leaves out almost two decades of active endeavours by various influential people of the era's cultic milieu. In my presentation, I will explore the historical rationalizations of this overlooked proto-New Age organization during its early years – coinciding with the outbreak of the First World War – in the local context of Finland. The Finnish branch of the OSE was founded in 1913 and remained active until the Order's dissolution. Its members were also active in various progressive movements of the time, such as socialism, educational reform, vegetarianism, and natural healing. These diverse interests were also reflected in the organization's publications, which I will discuss.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 137: Pasqualina Eckerström** – University of Helsinki / University of Turku

*Religion, Agency, and the Formation of Fairness and Patience: Experiences of Iraqi Women in Finland*

This study explores how Iraqi women in Finland construct and experience fairness and patience through religious frameworks and social contexts. Using an intersectional social-agency approach, it explores how religious identity, human rights awareness, and migration experiences interact in shaping these

concepts, and how factors such as age, marital status, and migration history influence their interpretation and practice. Drawing on intersectionality, theories of justice, and the sociology of religion, the study challenges dominant Western assumptions that frame fairness and patience as oppositional, where fairness is often associated with resistance and claims-making, and patience with passivity or submission. This study complicates these assumptions by conceptualises them as co-existing and mutually constitutive practices through which migrant women interpret inequality, navigate social expectations, and sustain agency over time. Based on qualitative surveys and interviews, the analysis examines fairness and patience across multiple levels: at the micro level, through everyday moral and religious negotiations; at the meso level, within family and community networks; and at the macro level, within the secular, gender-equal Finnish welfare state. By foregrounding the interrelationship between fairness and patience, the study contributes to understanding how religion and intersectional social positions shape moral reasoning and social agency, offering new insights into gender, migration, and lived religion in contemporary Europe.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 138: Shunichi Miyajima** – Hokkaido University

*Comparison of the "Irrational" in 20<sup>th</sup>-century German and Japanese Religious Studies*

Comparative approaches in global history are gaining prominence within religious studies. This presentation examines the concept of the "irrational" in twentieth-century German and Japanese scholarship. Since the modern era, religion has often been understood as containing irrational elements, which are regarded as a defining feature that distinguishes it from science and other cultural phenomena like politics and economics. Although such essentialist views have been widely criticized, the notion of religion's irrational dimension remains influential, as it informs critiques of scientism and supporting arguments for religion's continued relevance. This study examines how perceptions of this irrational element were formed, and compares the theories of religion proposed by Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) in Germany and Hideo Kishimoto (1903–1964) in Japan. In *The Idea of the Holy* (1918), Otto stripped the "sacred" of its rational and ethical elements, termed the remaining irrational elements as "the numinous," and regarded it as the core of religion, whereas Kishimoto excluded irrationality and defined religion's essence as a rational, ethical "pursuit of the ideal." Although often regarded as opposites, both viewed religions that actually exist as comprising rational and irrational elements, and isolated one aspect to define its essence. Both also maintained that a religious movement was necessary to realize that ideal. However, whereas Otto advocated rehabilitating the irrational, Kishimoto argued for its exclusion. This divergence likely stems from their distinct historical, social, and cultural contexts.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 139: Tuomas Äystö** – University of Helsinki

*The Construction of Religion and Technology in the 2020s US Media Coverage of Religion-associated AI*

Religion-associated AI (godbots, religious helper tools, embedded AI in religious spaces, etc.) has been a popular 2020s media topic. Journalism now tackles the perceived risks of religion-associated AI, often in ways not typical in the regular AI risk coverage. As one interested in the contemporary Western discourses on religion, I seized the opportunity to investigate how influential media voices construct religion and technology by analyzing how the risk of religion-associated AI is constituted (be it societal, theological, psychological etc.) My case is the United States, thought its discursive practices, whether they concern religion or technology, wield influence far beyond its own borders in the anglophone world, the rest of the West, and beyond. I analyze what the media discussion on godbots and the like can tell us about cultural conventions, power structures and potential consequences relating to constructing religion and technology and their relationship in particular ways.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 141: Victor Andrei Lambert** – Trinity College, University of Cambridge

*Salvation vs. Creativity: Christian Humanism and Theodore of Cyrus*

Nikolai Berdyaev opined that early Christianity, in its preoccupation for human salvation, forgot entirely about our second vocation of human creativity. Supposedly only the Renaissance humanists discovered that man, having the *imago Dei*, is himself a creator who fashions things both beautiful and useful. Is creative work merely a postlapsarian necessity? Or does it represent the original Edenic occupation of humanity? These questions invite a reappraisal of the Christian philosophical tradition, read from a new angle. Divine creation has basked under scholarly attention, but human creativity remains uncharted territory for historians of thought. For Platonist philosophers, the origin of the universe was a Craftsman playing with material; the human craftsman, meanwhile, was generally a socially lowly figure possessing neither grandeur nor respect. In the Christian period, with Plato's myths and Greek art now objects of suspicion, the Craftsman becomes the Creator, and no rhetoric or fancy can lessen the chasm between the creative God and his uncreative creatures. Under this context I wish to make a case study of the erudite 5<sup>th</sup>-century bishop Theodoret of Cyrus, who proclaimed that the mind is a 'new and small demiurge' which 'creates in imitation of the Creator'. It is hoped, consequently, that Berdyaev's thesis may be refined, and that a richer understanding of Christian attitudes to human creativeness may be gained. In our own time, with the concepts of artifice, intelligence, creativity, and learning now being wholly redefined, the philosophical study of creativity is more urgent than it has ever been.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 142: Giulia Marotta** – University of Münster

*Challenging Continuity A Multidimensional Analysis of Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*

This paper examines clergy sexual abuse in the Catholic Church as a lens for understanding religion as a historically shifting constellation of discourses, concepts, and practices. Religions are often perceived and studied as inherently continuous, with their authority and legitimacy deriving in part from this historical consistency. This perspective is particularly pronounced in the case of the Catholic Church, where institutional stability, long-standing doctrines, and enduring rituals are treated as evidence of an unbroken tradition. Such an approach assumes that the Church's present practices and moral frameworks are directly rooted in the past, presenting continuity as a defining and trustworthy feature of the institution. This assumption of continuity is especially evident in studies of the clergy sexual abuse scandal, where most historians have adopted a continuist approach. They emphasize an enduring "culture of secrecy" and a persistent "pattern of concealment and prohibition," tracing these features back to the medieval Church and presenting them as unchanging across centuries. Such narratives focus on the similarity of outcomes, often overlooking the significant historical shifts that have shaped the Church's handling of sexual misconduct over time. The hypothesis of a direct connection between the medieval emergence of the phenomenon and its present-day manifestation does not take into account important changes that mark specific turning points in Church history and that affected words (e.g., "sodomy" is no longer in use, while the word "abuse" appeared, at least in official documents, at the beginning of the 20th century), concepts (e.g., the concept of childhood, since even within the clerical milieu—perhaps except for the perpetrators—children were no longer seen as seductive beings as they were in the Middle Ages), and practices (for instance, in the premodern period there was no practice of relocating priests who had abused children, as it became common in recent decades). Although in the end the transformation of these elements continued to lead to a secretive and self-serving approach to the problem, these shifts invalidate the thesis of an unbroken and consistent pattern. Therefore, it is essential to consider the Church as a fully historical and cultural institution and not to assume the existence of permanent continuity merely based on the similarity of the end result. A 360-degree approach addresses this complexity by examining the phenomenon from multiple angles—linguistic, conceptual, and practical. Using the historiography of clergy sexual abuse as a case study, this approach captures both enduring structures, such as the Church's secretive tendencies, and the historical transformations that shaped how sexual abuse was defined, perceived, and managed. More broadly, this approach highlights the methodological value of treating religion as fluid, constructed, and continually evolving, showing that scholarly understanding of religious phenomena requires attention to both continuity and transformation.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 144: Cristian Ducu** – Centre for Advanced Research in Management and Applied Ethics, Bucharest

*Techno-Religious Revival or a Hijack of Religion? The Push for a Radical Christian Agenda within the U.S. Tech Industry*

In late 2025 and early 2026, many people were surprised to learn that Peter Thiel, the Chairman of Palantir Technologies and key figure of many other tech companies, lectured on the Antichrist in closed-doors events organized in San Francisco, Paris, and Rome. Some journalists and public intellectuals rushed to highlight the incompatibilities of Thiel's techno-apocalypticism with his own role in developing some of the most pervasive technologies (suspected of being used in mass surveillance, ICE targeting of immigrants etc.). Others have focused on the compatibility of these lectures with the 'neo-conservatism' of the American entrepreneur and his previous connections with Christian evangelical groups operating in Silicon Valley (EPIC Church and ACTS17 Collective). This paper is not concerned primarily with Thiel's ideas, but with a general push that we can see among the leaders of the U.S. tech industry, aiming to replace a secular ethical assessment of technological developments (encouraging a precautionary approach) with a Neo-protestant apocalyptic perspective justifying both 'accelerationism' and authoritarian uses of technology. Our hypothesis is that the current evangelical revival in Silicon Valley masks a radical Christian agenda that threatens not only democratic institutions, but the fabric of our free societies all over the world.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 145: Ionel Boamfă** – "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași

*Arguments in Favor of the Latin and Oriental Character of Romanian Christianity*

The transition to the new cult, in the first centuries of the Christian era, occurred, in the area inhabited by the Thracian-Dacians, in several stages. First, a small part converted, as early as the first century, in the urban centers of the Balkans and northwestern Asia Minor, following the missionary activity of the Holy Apostles Andrew, Paul and/or Philip. Later, in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, in Dacia, there are attested soldiers from the Roman army who were Christians, originating from Syria and practicing an oriental Christianity, of Judeo-Syrian origin (from the area of the Patriarchate of Antioch). Finally, a third «wave», which brought about the mass conversion of a large part of the Thracian-Dacians, took place after the Edict promulgated in Mediolanum (Milan) in 313 by the Thracian-Roman emperor Constantine the Great. Later, probably between 313 and 317, he had a probable discussion with the high priests of Zamolxe (including some of the northern Danubian ones), whom he apparently convinced to become "christiani et romani," which led, in Romanian, to „creștini și români” = "Christians and Romanians." The main argument, but not the only one, is given by the presence, in 325, at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, of 4 bishops of Dacian-Roman origin, a fact which attests that not only the Thracian-Dacians of the south of the Danube, but also those north of the river, converted to Christianity through Romanization, even though they were not under imperial authority, but under Gothic control. Other arguments illustrating this specificity – both Latin and Oriental – of Romanian Christianity, relate to the Latinity of the basic Christian vocabulary of the Romanian language, the fact that over 80% of the words in fundamental Christian texts (Tatăl Nostru = Our Father, Crezul = the Creed) are of Latin origin, the specifically Romanian evolution of the Romanian term/name Crăciun = Christmas and others.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 147: Per Faxneld** – Södertörn University

*Subtle Energy and Unity with the Cosmos: Aikido, Esalen, and Holistic Spirituality*

The presentation demonstrates how the Japanese martial art aikido has intersected with the holistic milieu, and ways that the two have exerted a bidirectional influence on one another. From the early 1970s, central figures in the so-called Human Potential Movement (HPM), a principal stream in the holistic milieu, wrote extensively about aikido, focusing on the "metanormal" abilities it could

supposedly develop in practitioners, and aikido was integrated into the classes on offer at the famous Esalen Institute in California and similar course centers. A chief point of interest was the notion of "ki", conceived of as a form of "subtle energy", which became a connecting bridge between fields like martial arts, the holistic milieu, older European esoteric currents, South and East Asian religio-spiritual and medicinal-therapeutic systems, and the parapsychology boom of the 1970s. Esalen figures were particularly interested in the extrasensory perception (ESP) and experiences of transcendence and unity with the cosmos aikido appeared to offer. Aikido thus, the presentation argues, became an example *par excellence* in the holistic milieu (and, through its vast global impact, in broader Euro-American culture), of how martial arts can function as a tool for attaining both a type of miraculous abilities and direct mystical experience. Finally, the presentation discusses how the holistic milieu's framing of aikido impacted martial arts discourse far beyond the persons with immediate personal connections to Esalen and similar contexts.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 149: Alain F.G. Blomart** – University Ramon Llull, Barcelona  
*Prophetic Cults and Peripheral Location: Comparative Approach*

This study explores the relationship between prophetic cults and spatial marginality across ancient and comparative cultural contexts. Focusing initially on Greek and Roman antiquity, it examines deities such as Asclepius, Faunus, and Apollo, whose modes of communication—especially direct prophecy through dreams or trance—situate them at the margins of civic and religious order. Particular attention is given to sites such as the Tiber Island in Rome and sanctuaries like Delphi, where divine speech emerges in spaces that are physically or institutionally peripheral. Extending beyond the Mediterranean, the study incorporates evidence from African, Asian, and American traditions to highlight a recurring association between inspired forms of divination and liminal environments such as mountains, forests, deserts, or urban peripheries. The project aims to compare prophetic and possession cults across ancient Greek, Roman, and Indian contexts, while integrating evidence from other world regions, in order to identify deep structural similarities in religious thought. It argues that despite cultural diversity, these traditions share a common mental framework: the conception of inspired prophecy as a powerful yet potentially destabilizing form of access to the divine. This apparent universality suggests not only cross-cultural parallels but possibly a fundamental unity in the human understanding of divine communication, in which immediacy, embodiment, and marginality are intrinsically linked. The research adopts a comparative and interdisciplinary methodology, combining textual analysis of ancient sources, archaeological and spatial evidence, and anthropological theory. By mobilizing concepts such as liminality and ritual marginality, it analyzes both the symbolic and political dimensions of prophetic practices. Cross-cultural comparison enables the identification of recurring patterns while accounting for local variations.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 154: Teodora Dumitru** – The "G. Călinescu" Institute for Literary History and Theory, Romanian Academy  
*Fighting Fascism with Fascism: Rhetorics of Vicious Exoneration in Romanian Post-Communism*

In line with the exploration of fascism as "political religion" developed, expanded or supplemented by Roger Griffin, Roland Clark, Raul Cârstocea, and others, this presentation primarily examines the discursive strategies through which far-right organizations and structures in Romania during the 1920s–1940s such as the Legionary Movement (1927–1941) and Marshal Ion Antonescu's government (1940–1944) were promoted—both by their leaders and top collaborators (Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu, Marshal Ion Antonescu himself) and by sympathizers, co-militants or „comrades” such as the historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) and/or the philosopher Mircea Vulcănescu (1904–1952)—as essentially *apolitical/ anti-materialist/ „spiritualist/ „religious/ “Christian,”* and specifically *Filetist*, that is, *Romanian Orthodox* (native) movements. Drawing on information from sources that have been less or incompletely examined—such as Legionary press articles, mainly from 1940–1941—the presentation goes on to debunk (or contribute new evidence towards debunking) theories put forward in post-

communist Romania in order to deny, relativize, or whitewash the involvement of some highly prominent Romanian intellectuals in Romanian fascism. Trying to prove the non-fascism of certain figures from the 1930s and 1940s, these theories happen instead to mobilize—most likely unintentionally and out of ignorance—central tropes found in fascist handbooks and propaganda literature. A telling example of this is the claim that Eliade's conception of change ("revolution") is "apolitical"/„spiritualist"/„Christian" by nature, and thus presumed fundamentally non-fascist—a claim that has been steadfastly defended, from the 1990s to the present day, by scholars such as the historian and semiotician Sorin Alexandrescu (b. 1937). However, a study of far-right literature and journalism of the era reveals that this claim naively and unwittingly circulates—while at the same time re-legitimizing and normalizing—definitions and tropes of local fascism launched by (or attributed to) Zelea-Codreanu and Antonescu or featured in journalism propaganda. Mechanisms of self-legitimization and self-promotion employed by Romanian fascists become, in the post-communist era, tools for whitewashing and absolving responsibility, a fact that is all the more alarming given the rampant rise of right-wing extremism in Romania in the 2020s.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 155: Marco Palombi de Vigo-Rendena** – Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem-Malta / Italian Association of Sociologists

*Theology of War and Sacrifice: Hospitaller Orders in the Crusades and the Second Spiritual Inversion of Battle*

The Hospitaller Orders in the Crusades represent a third spiritual inversion in the theology of war and sacrifice. Rome had made violence the foundation of order; Christianity, through martyrdom, transformed suffering into power and into the seed of a new civitas. The Hospitaller Orders introduced a further inversion. In acknowledging the fate of the sick, the wounded, and the diseased, they acknowledged their own fate, and thus entered battle already resolved before death. The hospital revealed what the battlefield concealed: that no flesh returns whole, and that suffering is not an exception but the final truth of embodied life. At this point, both the theology of war and the theology of martyrdom begin to decay as separate forms. What remains is the suffering body itself as the last theological centre, and the care of that body as the final sacred vocation.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 158: Eglė Aleknaitė-Škarubskė** – Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas

*Constructing Christian Persecution: the Case of Lithuanian Catholic Church*

The modern Christian persecution discourse emerged in the US. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, various groups of Christian actors have adopted it, or its alternative based on human rights language, in Europe and elsewhere and used it for various purposes, such as the fight against (Muslim) migrants or gender equality initiatives. Existing research confirms that the discourse is known in Lithuania and some Catholic actors use it for their anti-genderist endeavors. It seems that the popularity of the discourse is growing but some influential clergy members and lay people are questioning it. Furthermore, some radical promoters of the discourse are in conflict with the hierarchy of the Lithuanian Catholic Church and tend to draw inspiration and construct links with Evangelicals of other countries, especially of the US and the UK. Thus, the paper presents an analysis of the public discourse constructed in the official media of the Lithuanian Catholic Church (periodical *Bažnyčios žinios* and websites of archdioceses) of the 1990s–2020s. The media publish official Church documents and report developments in Lithuania, the Vatican, and other countries. The analysis shows that the Christian persecution during the Soviet period is still most relevant for the Lithuanian Catholic Church. At the same time, the paper confirms the presentation of the gender politics-related Christian persecution discourse in the official Lithuanian Catholic media and aims to explore the contexts of the presentation, constructed links between the perceived gender politics-related persecution and other categories of persecution, the relationship of the discourse to the developments of gender-politics in Lithuania, the development of the presentation and its relationships with the discourse promoted by Lithuanian radical Catholic actors.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 160: Ann-Kathrin Bretfeld-Wolf** – Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Trondheim

*Pāli History Beyond the Master-Narrative The Dhāṭuvam̐sa's Version of 'Buddha Visits' and the Power of Adaptations*

This paper summarises the results of my doctoral thesis that studies how a local history, the Pāli Dhāṭuvam̐sa, has adapted the cultural topos of 'Buddha visits' to its local setting. This cultural topos of 'Buddha visits' has been of high significance for the religio-cultural identity of various Sri Lankan Buddhist communities who frequently give accounts of the visits of the Buddha to Sri Lanka in their historiographies. However, until recently, research on Sri Lankan Buddhist historiography has dismissed stories like the 'Buddha visits' as 'legendary' materials and later texts like the Dhāṭuvam̐sa as inferior copies of older historiographies. As a result, both have been underexplored until today. The study represents one of the first studies of the Pāli Dhāṭuvam̐sa and thus joins the ranks of recent discursive research located at the intersection of the Study of Religion and Buddhist Studies that focuses on Pāli texts from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Providing a narrative and culture-historical case study of the 'story of the three visits of the Buddha' in the Pāli Dhāṭuvam̐sa, this study implements a context-sensitive analytical framework informed by narratological approaches. By means of an intertextual analysis of the narrative structures of the 'Buddha visits' story, the study demonstrates how the interplay between adaptation and narrative conventions enables the cultural topos of 'Buddha visits' to endure over time, cross geographical spaces, and generate localized Buddhist identities.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 162: Viktoras Bachmetjevas** – Vytautas Magnus University Kaunas

*The Unshareable Truth: Kierkegaard's Indirect Communication and the Limits of Religious Knowledge in a 360° Epistemic Landscape*

This paper argues that Søren Kierkegaard's conception of religion as fundamentally incommunicable through direct discourse offers a critical lens for reassessing the epistemic ambitions of the contemporary academic study of religions. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard insists that "the religious individual can never use direct communication," because religious truth concerns not objective propositions but the *subjective appropriation* of existence. Direct communication belongs to "objective thinking," whereas religious inwardness requires indirect communication, which addresses the *how* of belief rather than the *what*. Building on recent scholarship that identifies multiple models of Kierkegaard's indirect communication—preservation of subjectivity, divine incognito, deception into truth, and the inadequacy of language—the paper shows how these models collectively destabilize the assumption that religious knowledge can be circumscribed, systematized, or publicly shared in the same manner as other forms of knowledge. This has direct implications for the conference's central questions about whether the study of religions remains a unified knowledge project or has fragmented beyond recognition. I propose that Kierkegaard's approach does not undermine the academic study of religion but reorients it: from the production of transmissible content toward the cultivation of interpretive spaces where religious subjectivity can emerge without being reduced. In a moment marked by post-truth dynamics, AI acceleration, and epistemic overload, Kierkegaard's insistence on the irreducibility of inwardness offers a timely critique of the assumption that all knowledge—especially religious knowledge—can be communicated, archived, and circulated in 360°.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 165: Marco Giardini** – Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at Ruhr-Universität Bochum

*John of Rupescissa's Millennial Kingdom: A Medieval Precedent of Early Modern "Philosemitism"?*

The paper examines some interpretations of the "millennial kingdom" — as described in *Revelation 20:1-6* — by John of Rupescissa, a Franciscan visionary active in the mid-fourteenth century and the author of a large prophetic work framed within the main trajectories of Joachimite propheticism. Unlike most contemporary interpreters, Rupescissa reads the thousand years literally. A key element of this vision is

the return of the Jews to Palestine, following their final conversion to a reformed Christianity, and the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel, which would then rule over the whole world until the end of time. This unprecedented recovery of a central element of Jewish messianic thought goes hand in hand with the idea of Crusade: the Holy Land is to be conquered by a Christian universal ruler embodying the traits of the "Last World Emperor," as described in the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius and the *Tiburtine Sibyl*. The same cluster of ideas — conquest of the Holy Land by a universal Christian ruler, conversion and return of the Jews, restoration of a Jewish kingdom — also appears in the works of several seventeenth-century "philosemitic" authors, including the French writers Isaac La Peyrère (*Rappel des Juifs*) and, a century earlier, Guillaume Postel, who inserts these elements of Jewish derivation within his own prophetic framework. The paper compares the picture of the Jewish kingdom in Rupescissa's reading of the millennial kingdom with those found in the two authors mentioned above, and asks whether the medieval visionary may have influenced the rise of early modern philosemitism.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 166: Aleš Črnič** – University of Ljubljana  
*Lost in Translation: Religion, Faith, and Belief in Slavic (Linguistic) Contexts*

As part of the postmodern and decolonial turn in religious studies, scholars have increasingly questioned the presumed universality of the concept of religion itself. Critical analyses of belief, faith, and religion have shown that their frequent equation reflects a Protestant bias, one that conceptualises religion primarily in terms of individual belief or inner conviction. Such a model is deeply problematic, as many religious traditions do not privilege belief in this way. Moreover, contemporary Western societies increasingly exhibit forms of religion "without believing" (G. Davie), while theories of embodied and lived religion demonstrate that, even for many traditionally religious individuals, faith and belief are not necessarily central concerns in everyday practice. This paper contributes to these debates by addressing a largely neglected terminological and linguistic issue: the common conflation of religion and faith in Slavic languages. Whereas English distinguishes between religion (institution), faith (relational trust), belief (cognitive assent), creed (institutional doctrine), and piety (practice), most Slavic languages collapse these dimensions into a single term (*vera*, *vjera*, *víra*, *vjara*, *wiara*). The paper explores this linguistic reduction and its conceptual, cultural, and political consequences.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 167-168: Mareike Heinritz & Louise Neubronner** – University of Tübingen, University Library  
*Enhancing Visibility, Fostering Engagement: RelBib as a Participatory Platform for the Study of Religion*

As the study of religion becomes increasingly diverse and interconnected with other disciplines, the communication of an ever-growing, multifaceted body of research represents a great challenge. How can this knowledge be made visible, accessible, and easily navigable? This is where RelBib (<https://relbib.de>) comes in. Launched in 2017, RelBib is an open-access online bibliography that currently comprises more than 1.2 million records of academic literature on religion(s). Covering a large range of languages, disciplines and formats – from monographs and journal articles to blogs and podcasts – it provides comprehensive insight into scholarly production in the field. In doing so, it not only supports researchers in staying up to date on methodologies and thematic developments in the study of religion as well as neighbouring subjects but also fosters cohesion and exchange within the academic community. Our paper focuses on key services through which RelBib actively engages scholars and enhances the visibility of their work. Among others, these include the self-archiving service, which enables researchers to make their publications openly accessible worldwide. We also highlight RelBib's dedication to fostering scholarly collaboration, for example through partnerships with initiatives such as the Women Scholars' Network. In this way, we present RelBib as both a research tool and a community-driven platform and invite active participation at a pivotal stage in its development: its transition from an established, but still project-based infrastructure to a long-term, sustainable resource for the study of religion.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 171: Alisha Saikia** – University of Vienna  
*Haunted Dolls: Intermediate Beings and Anchors of Spiritual Expression*

This paper examines the phenomenon of haunted doll collecting as a contemporary form of individualized spiritual practice situated at the intersection of neo-animism and material religion. Haunted dolls are understood by collectors as objects inhabited by spirit-bound, vessels, protective entities or residual presences who are engaged with not as passive commodities but as intermediate beings possessing agency and intentionality. Within a neo-animist framework, haunted dolls can be perceived as animated beings where the ethics of care and mutual respect remains central. There is an emphasis on an ethical relationship between the collector and the haunted doll where the autonomy of the spirit is respected and the collector invests in creating a safe and welcoming environment for the spirit to interact. The practices of communication, ritual care (offering of incense, candles, creating an altar) and interpretation of signs such as dreams, emotional impression, subtle environmental changes can be observed as micro-rituals of lived religion. These interactions are embedded in everyday routines and mediated through material engagement, aligning with approaches in material religion, where objects become sites of sacralization through use and attention. The notion of haunting introduces an element of externalized agency, positioning the doll as a co-present other rather than a projection of the self. The paper also highlights the affective and therapeutic dimensions of collecting haunted dolls, demonstrating how haunted dolls function as companions, emotional anchors, and tools for meaning-making. By foregrounding the interplay between belief, narrative, and materiality, this paper argues that haunted doll collecting represents a significant mode of contemporary spiritual expression.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 172: Andrea Maria Nencini** – University of Florence  
*Habit and Religious Beliefs: A Jamesian and 4E Cognition Perspective*

In recent years, William James's work has received growing attention from the 4E (embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended) approach to cognition, which credits James, along with other pragmatists, with having recognized the role of habit in the construction and development of embodied dispositions, both physical and mental. While existing scholarship has addressed James's pragmatism in relation to embodied beliefs and the 4E approach to cognition, as well as the connection between his two seminal works, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) and *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902), the specific relationship between his treatment of habit and his interpretation of religious phenomena has yet to receive focused and sustained attention. This paper offers a close textual analysis of *The Varieties*, showing how James's account of habit in *The Principles* directly shaped his definition of beliefs as "rules for action." Furthermore, by updating James's insights in light of the contemporary debate on habit within the 4E cognition framework, this paper argues that his analysis of habit remains relevant and deserves reassessment for its analytical and interpretive value in the study of religious phenomena. Specifically, it proposes that habit, understood as an embodied and pragmatic disposition with a selective history, provides a more productive framework for understanding the sedimentation and transmission of religious beliefs than models that treat belief primarily as an inner, mental state.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 173: Petra Oh-Lorinczi** – University of Debrecen  
*The Yoido Full Gospel Church and the Question of Religious Syncretism*

This research explores the continuing influence of Korean indigenous religions on modern Korean Christianity through the example of the Yoido Full Gospel Church. The central question is whether the remarkable growth and character of Korean Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism, can be understood without considering the religious traditions that existed in Korea before Christianity. The study argues that Korean Protestantism did not simply replace older beliefs. Instead, it developed through a process of religious syncretism in which elements of Korean shamanism, Neo-Confucianism, and Buddhism were reinterpreted within a Christian framework. As a result, Korean Christianity became a unique form of

religion that is both Christian and deeply rooted in Korean cultural traditions. The first part of the research introduces the theoretical concepts that form the basis of the analysis. It examines definitions of religion, religious experience, and syncretism, while also discussing the idea of cultural hybridity. Korean indigenous religion is approached not only as a set of beliefs, but as a lived spiritual practice that shaped everyday life in Korea. Particular attention is given to animism, ancestor worship, healing rituals, sacred space, mediation between the human and spiritual worlds, and the importance of direct religious experience. The research then traces the historical development of Korean shamanism and its interaction with Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, and Christianity. Rather than disappearing, shamanistic ideas continued to survive within these later traditions. This process produced a specifically Korean form of religiosity in which older beliefs remained present beneath new religious forms. Special emphasis is placed on the similarities between Korean indigenous religious practices and Protestant Christianity. Many important features of Korean Protestantism such as prayer for blessing and prosperity, healing, revival meetings, emotional worship, dreams, visions, exorcism, and spiritual warfare are closely resemble the patterns of the traditional religions of the Korean Peninsula. These similarities do not mean that Korean Christianity is simply another form of shamanism, Buddhism or Confucianism. Instead, they show that Christianity in Korea developed within a cultural environment already shaped by indigenous ways of understanding the sacred.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 174-175: Karl Henrik Johnsen & Staffan Nilsson** – Södertörn University  
*The Emergence of a New Kind of Religious Education Teacher in Sweden*

This paper concerns students becoming upper secondary teachers in religious education in Sweden. The subject religious education is today a non-confessional and mandatory school subject in Sweden. The present project originates from an observation, particularly within the teacher education program at Södertörn University in Sweden: A significant and growing proportion of students preparing to become upper secondary teachers in religious education today have a migrant and religious background or identity, with only a small minority being secular or affiliated Protestant Christians. A considerable number of the students identify as Muslims. Yet, the religious group with the strongest representation are Syriac Orthodox Christians. The strong presence of these groups suggests that Swedish religious education teachers increasingly embody religious and migrant identities that, until quite recently, were scarcely represented in the profession. The main aim of the project is to explore how prospective religious education teachers for upper secondary school with a Syriac Orthodox identity and affiliation understand their future role as religious education teachers and whether and to what extent they perceive or anticipate tensions between their religious identity and their future professional role. The empirical material will be gathered primarily through interviews and surveys.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 176-177: Iman Lechkar & Elias Woodbridge** – Vrije Universiteit Brussel  
*Repentance Behind Bars: Lived Islam, Tawba and Moral Transformation among Muslim Men in Prison*

This paper examines how the Islamic concept of repentance (tawba) is understood and practiced by Muslim men in a Belgian prison. Grounded in Quranic notions of God as Most Merciful and Forgiving, the study explores how incarcerated individuals navigate guilt, moral responsibility, and the pursuit of redemption. Drawing on 21 semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2023 and March 2024, the analysis adopts a grounded theory approach to capture the lived religious experiences of prisoners with diverse levels of Islamic practice. The findings show that incarceration often intensifies prisoners' relationship with Allah, with seeking forgiveness emerging as a central concern. Repentance is closely tied to anxieties about the afterlife and the desire to become a "good" Muslim, motivating practices such as prayer, charity, and self-reflection. At the same time, sincerity is seen as essential for valid repentance, shaping how individuals engage with religious rituals and evaluate their own intentions. The empirical data also show that the process of moral transformation is marked by ongoing struggle. Structural constraints of prison life, such as drug availability, limited resources, and challenges in observing religious duties intersect with personal weaknesses, producing cycles of guilt, shame, and

renewed repentance. By foregrounding the heterogeneity of religious experiences, this paper contributes to scholarship on religion in prison and to the literature on lived religion and Islamic ethics.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 182: Francisco Santos Silva** – NOVA University Lisbon

*Economics of Storytelling: Similarities between the Religions of Oral Traditions and Role-Playing Games*

Paradoxically, some of the oldest forms of religion, those which are connected to oral traditions of storytelling, are surprisingly close to some of the newest forms of religious storytelling: those related to the multimedia expressions and shared universes of role-playing games. While oral traditions were often spread through itinerant storytellers which required constant narrative innovation to keep an audience interested, the same happens with role-playing games where universes such as those in which games like *Dungeons and Dragons* are set span hundreds of novels, tabletop adventures and computer games. Here is where we come to the idea of "economics" of storytelling, if a storyteller (be it a bard or a media company) needs to "sell" their stories, these need to be changeable in nature, adding new events which often need their stakes to be high enough to keep an audience interested. These high-stakes often come in the shape of religious and mythological storytelling set within living universes where gods die and are reborn, or heroes rise up to challenge divinities, giving these universes a protean and interactive nature. In this paper, I will, then, defend the idea that in contrast to more crystalized "religions of the book," where set texts allow for little innovation in storytelling terms, oral and multimedia storytelling about religion share the need to astound audiences with new stories which keep those religious traditions ever-changing.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 183-186: Tomáš Hampejs, Robert L.J. Shaw, Katalin Suba & David Zbírál** – Masaryk University, Brno

*Conflict in the Archive: Religious Belief Occurrence and Interrogative Density in Medieval Heresy Trial Depositions*

Medieval inquisition depositions are notarially produced evidentiary documents. While the trial events with multiple interacting actors (inquisitor, deponent and notary) are at their origin, the institutional purpose and editorial judgment are primary source of a recasted written record. Patterns in the text are patterns of the archive first, just inferentially of the event. This is a caution that becomes productive: instead of asking what happened in the room, we can ask what the archive chose to preserve, and where it chose to make religious conflict visible and how. This paper pursues that question through clause-level analysis of 801 depositions from two inquisitorial registers (Toulouse 1273-1282; Bologna 1291-1307). A large language model annotated each clause for content type, narrative agency, and interrogative structure; a mixed-effects logistic regression modelled the distribution of belief across the record. The central finding is a strong coupling between interrogative density, the accumulation of preserved question-response structure and belief content. Clauses marked as answers to recorded questions are approximately twice as likely to contain belief, with the effect strongest for theological belief, the most abstract and doctrinally contested domain. Narration of concrete social circumstances suppresses belief expression almost entirely; belief clusters in dense textual bursts around passages of high interrogative density. Whether this reflects inquisitorial pursuit of contested content, notarial choices about evidentiary framing, or both cannot be determined from the archive alone. The archive shows only that theological belief and interrogative density co-occur systematically. A pattern that invites but exceeds any single causal story.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 190: Will O'Brien** – University of Notre Dame

*Mystic & Militant: The anti-colonial militancy of Ahmed as-Sharif as-Sanūsī*

In 1911, at the outbreak of the Italo-Turkish War, Ahmed as-Sharif as-Sanūsī put aside his military campaign against the French in Wadai to return to his home in Ottoman Tripolitania to oppose the military incursion by the Italian Colonial State. This period of anti-colonial military leadership

coincided with Ahmed as-Sharif's leadership of the Sanūsiyya, a Sufi order founded by his grandfather Muhammad ibn 'Ali as-Sanūsī seven decades earlier. As the leader of the Sanūsiyya from 1902 until 1916, Ahmed as-Sharif balanced the religious tenets of mysticism and charismatics with military strategy and the use of armed violence to resist European colonial expansion. Secularization efforts by Muammar Gaddafi during the 1970s led to Sanūsiyya adherents involved in the anti-colonial struggle being repurposed as Libyan nationalist figures, reading the Sufi tradition out of the armed anti-colonial campaigns. Renowned for his military prowess, Ahmed as-Sharif remains understudied for his spiritual leadership and how that spiritual leadership shaped his worldview and use of violence. Drawing on a broad body of scholarship related to decolonization, violence, and studies of religion—including Fanon, Arendt, and Omer—this scholarship interrogates the role of decolonization in the study of religion through the history of religiously motivated anti-colonial efforts and explores the possibilities for studying religious traditions that have been shaped by colonial encounter.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 192: Matei Dan Epure** – Vanderbilt University

*You Have Rome in Your Town: Locality, Abstract Communities, and the Indulgence Controversy*

This paper reconstructs the Indulgence Controversy – the debate that culminated in Martin Luther's excommunication and led the way to the Protestant Reformation – as a debate over the proper scope of Christian moral responsibility. In doing so, it challenges the widespread historiographical assumption that non-elite early modern piety was largely parochial and shows that appeals to locality could command large-scale attention within the religious public discourse of sixteenth-century Germany. Modern accounts, shaped heavily by early Protestant propaganda, have tended to treat indulgences solely as evidence of late medieval ecclesiastical corruption and as a trigger of the Reformation – a form of selling salvation rather than proclaiming the gospel of unmerited grace. Luther's earliest critique, however, did not primarily concentrate on either soteriological or ecclesiological concerns. Instead, I argue that he attacked the indulgence trade as a misdirection of Christian obligation: away from the believer's duties toward the neighbor "at home" and toward grand, spiritually prestigious works "elsewhere." Drawing on indulgence sermons, printed announcements, and other materials from indulgence campaigns, I show that indulgence preaching addressed laypeople as participants in wider and competing religious communities. Indulgence campaigns thus helped construct a premodern public space in which ordinary Christians were asked to imagine themselves within abstract geographical and moral frameworks. Luther's intervention rose to prominence by attacking these claims with a rival ethic of local responsibility.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 198: Asaf Sharabi** – Peres Academic Center, Rehovot

*Performative Accountability and the Emergence of Divine Authority in North India*

Bakhan, an annual divination ritual in Himachal Pradesh, India, is a public event in which village deities speak through human mediums to offer guidance and predictions. Rather than treating prophecy primarily as a response to uncertainty, this article approaches the bakhan as a social and interpretive process in which divine statements are examined, contested, and negotiated. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research, I develop the concept of performative accountability to show how divine authority is both enacted and exposed to evaluation in the course of ritual interaction. Divine speech does not simply assert authority; it must be received, interpreted, and, at times, challenged by those who gather to hear it. Authority, in this sense, emerges within a shared space of engagement rather than preceding it. The analysis contributes to broader discussions in the study of religion by reconsidering prophecy not as a fixed channel of revelation but as a dynamic process in which claims to transcendence are tested in relation to communal expectations, moral frameworks, and ongoing concerns. It highlights a relational form of sacred authority, one that depends on how human communities assess divine utterances and decide whether, and how, to recognize them.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 202: Helge Årsheim** – Faculty of Inland Norway

*Yes, Minister? - Exploring State-run Offices of Religion Around the World*

This paper presents an exploratory account of the establishment and operations of state-run institutions dedicated to the management of religious affairs. Such institutions vary greatly in mandate, jurisdiction and scope, and can be found across the world at different levels of governance. The paper maps the existing research literature on the topic and provides a typology of such institutions, examining the origins and grounds for their establishment, their operational history, the items typically covered under their jurisdiction, and their relationship with other governmental entities and domestic and international courts. Throughout the paper, the ways in which these institutions conceptualize and approach religion as an item of governance is unpacked and assessed, paying particular attention to the kinds of expertise usually involved in the state-driven governance of religion at such institutions.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 204: Igor Jurekovič** – University of Ljubljana

*Worship Music Between Empowerment and Constraint of Charismatic Christianity: Preliminary Findings from Slovenia*

The growth of Charismatic Christianity is arguably one of the most significant religious developments of the past century. Originating as a Protestant renewal movement in the United States, it expanded throughout the twentieth and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, establishing Pentecostal churches, inspiring renewal movements within traditional denominations, and fundamentally reshaping Evangelical Christianity. While its theological and many social features have been widely examined, the role and meaning of worship music remains a relatively understudied aspect of Charismatic life, despite its centrality in contemporary Christian practice. This paper examines contemporary Christian worship music as a transnational vehicle of Charismatic and Evangelical Christianity in Slovenia. Drawing on a PhD study, supplemented by semi-structured interviews and a qualitative analysis of a public database of translated songs, it presents initial findings on the state of worship music in Slovenia. The analysis highlights both the homogenization of worship styles and the marginalization of local musical production. While acknowledging the empowering potential of contemporary worship music as an alternative to traditional hymnody, the paper also underscores the constraints associated with its importation, as reported by participants. It concludes with a discussion of the broader implications of the homogenization of worship practices across different Christian churches and communities.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 206: Saile Johanna Langsepp** – University of Tartu

*Body Turning the Mind to Divine: Theory and Practice of Circle Element in Sacred Dances*

Circular movement could be considered the most basic, and yet the most mesmerizing and timeless element of dance. Various forms of circles can be seen in dances across different continents, where they are used intentionally for ritual practices. But what are the conceptual meanings behind the circular movements in choreography and what are its physical, somatic effects? Inspired by the main topic of EASR annual conference, this presentation takes two-fold look into the question of round-about perspective of the study of religions. Firstly, it focuses to widely practiced but not accordingly studied practice of dance in religious context. Connecting religious studies and dance studies, the chosen approach involves interdisciplinary possibilities for research. Secondly, this presentation delves more precisely into the embodied circle itself: how does the concept of circle manifest in sacred dances? Taking into account respective canonical meanings and physical dimension of moving body, four following cases of dynamic circles emerging in dance are discussed: "collective circles" based on interspiritual movement called Dances of Universal Peace; "individual circles" based on Sufi whirling practice in Mevlevi Order; "circles of trajectory" based on Vajrayana Buddhist dances; "circles of ritual objects" in dance based on Miko-Kagura, a Shinto temple dance. Emphasis on different streams of communications are pointed out and compared within the framework of somatics and kinaesthetics. Finally, it is discussed how that kind of specific knowledge can contribute to the wider field of study of religions.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 207: Sofia Anna Kjellberg** – Södertörn University  
*UFOs and an Ethical Spirituality*

The spiritual UFO community in Sweden embodies a shift from self-spirituality towards engagement in rituals and practices aimed at contributing to a better world. I term this *ethical spirituality* and argue that self-sacrifice and the experience of having a mission provide members with a feeling of fulfillment. The material consists of participant observations of rituals and interviews with community members. Whereas the New Age context, from which the UFO community emerges, emphasizes the therapeutic outcomes of spiritual practices, the UFO community understands wellbeing as a positive by-product of the responsibility and mission it takes itself to have been given. They thereby understand a worthwhile life as achieved through sacrificing to something external, rather than focusing solely on the internal self. Being well would, according to Charles Taylor's distinction between *lifegood* and *constitutive good* (2011), be considered the former, while the latter refers to the foundation required to attain the lifegood. Executing a mission to spread love and knowledge can be explained as a way of *doing* as well as *loving* the constitutive good. Although members show skepticism towards ethics and morality, their way of performing spirituality is ethical. They rely on intuition rather than obligation and thus approach the constitutive good in a manner that, as Taylor argues, traditional ethical framework cannot. The article contributes to empirical ethics by (1) offering a more developed understanding of what has previously been described as self-spirituality, as well as (2) an analysis of an ongoing shift within the spiritual milieu.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 208: Sebastian Elsässer** – CAU Kiel  
*Sect, Secret Society or Social Movement? What is the Muslim Brotherhood from a Sociological Perspective?*

The Muslim Brotherhood—arguably one of the most influential organizations of Sunni Islam in the Arab world during the 20th and early 21st centuries—remains a blind spot in the sociology of religion to this day. Although it is indisputably a religious community that invokes the Islamic faith – more specifically, conservative Sunni Islam – as a unifying bond, it has mostly been researched using the paradigms of political science. Yet in recent literature, terms such as "sect" or "cult" have started to appear – mostly without rigor and far removed from the current state of the debate in the sociology of religion – often with a critical, and sometimes even accusatory, intent (cf. Menshawy, Mustafa: Is the Muslim Brotherhood a Sect? *Religions* 2024, 15, 805. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070805>). To counter this unsatisfactory state of affairs with a convincing definition grounded in the study of religion, this article proposes a two-step approach: First, the Muslim Brotherhood should be compared with similar religious groups within the Muslim context of the Middle East. It becomes apparent that it is part of a family of "new Islamic communities" (Arabic: *ḡamā'a*; Turkish: *cemaat*), all of which have emerged from the legacy of the Sufi orders – the most common form of religious community in the pre-modern Muslim world. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, amid the process of social modernization, these groups succeeded in creating new forms of religious community by creatively adapting existing traditions. In a subsequent step, these "new Islamic communities" can be classified within a general sociological typology of religion. It turns out that—far beyond their similarities to new-age "cults"—they share distinct commonalities with 'free churches' of Protestant Christianity, which emerged as a fundamentalist response to social change and are, at the same time, part of a process of social modernization in many parts of the world.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 209: Willy Pfändtner** – Stockholm University  
*Religion and Philosophical Idealism in India and Europe*

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the awareness of Indian philosophy became prominent among some European philosophers. It was specifically the Vedantic philosophy of the Upanishads that caught their interest, not least due to a translation into Latin by the orientalist A.H. Anquetil-Duperron. There were some resemblances with the idealist philosophies developing in Europe after the Kantian "Copernican revolution". This paper gives an overview of this period, when Indian philosophy was relevant also for Western academic philosophy. It was a period when absolute idealism was a trend in

Europe, a philosophy that had something in common with the monistic idealism of Advaita Vedanta, which was the dominating philosophical interpretation of the Upanishads. The paper also deals with the reaction to absolute idealism from theistically inclined philosophers in Europe, who presented various versions of personal idealism. In India, the monistic idealism of Advaita Vedanta had likewise been challenged by more theistically inclined philosophers, whose philosophies could be designated as personal idealism. This personal idealism of India was probably not known by the by European personalists at the time. However, there are some correspondences between European and Indian personal idealism, which is shown in this paper. The paper ends with some thoughts about the relevance of idealism today for the understanding of religion and the fundamental nature of reality.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 212: Daan F. Oostveen** – University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht  
*Lanyu Island's Multiple Christianities: Rethinking Taiwan and Tao Indigenous Culture*

The history of the small Lanyu (Orchid) island, about 60 km southeast off of the Taiwan mainland, has a very distinct trajectory separate from Taiwan main island. Its native inhabitants, the Tao ("human") people were shielded from outside influence until late into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, since the Japanese colonial power in Taiwan (1895-1945) treated the island as an ethnological research area, barring visitors to the island. The Tao people, therefore, remain some of the most "preserved" aboriginal people of Taiwan. Since its unification under the rule of the Republic of China in 1945, Lanyu has slowly seen more outside influence. In this paper, I will focus on the religious diversity of Lanyu island. Surprising, with a population of only about 5000 inhabitants, the island hosts at least five different Christian denominations, including Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, True Jesus Church, Assembly of God and even a Russian Orthodox bakery. Despite its connection to native Tao religion, the people firmly identify as a Christian island. How can we understand this Christian diversity? How do the Tao people express their faith in their material culture, while staying faithful to their distinct aborigine identity? To what does their Christianity enhance a sense of belonging, as opposed to the Taiwan mainland dominant Tao-Buddhist religious culture? I will argue that Lanyu island offers a mis-en-abyme analogy to the China Mainland - Taiwan relation, adding to the complexity of the encounter between Chinese and Pacific Islander identities in the East China Sea.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 215: Pekka Pitkälä** – University of Turku  
*The Artistic and Esoteric Agency of Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (1870-1946)*

The paper focuses on the agency of the Finnish artist and writer Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (Georg Sigurd Asp / Wetterhoff-Asp, 1870-1946). Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed that most languages had their origins in Finnish. He also claimed that the ancient Egyptian language and culture were of Finnish origin. Wettenhovi-Aspa has until recently mostly been remembered for these unconventional ideas, related to various esoteric currents, rather than his artistic career. Wettenhovi-Aspa studied painting and sculpture in Paris in the 1890s, where Swedenborg's ideas, theosophical ideas of the unity of divinities and mythological texts and the interests in Oriental and ancient Egyptian and Assyrian culture converged. On the other hand, the culture of the Nordic countries was seen as pure and uncorrupted, and inspirational by both local artists and, for example, Swedish and Finnish artists as well. Wettenhovi-Aspa combined these idealised notions of Northern and Southern cultures in his works. He was also influenced by such contemporary writers as August Strindberg and Joséphin Péladan, whose Salons de la Rose+Croix he participated in. From the 1910s onwards Wettenhovi-Aspa focused increasingly on writing instead of visual arts. I argue that it is impossible to separate Wettenhovi-Aspa's artistic creation from his esoteric thought. As a researcher I am, however, obliged to focus on written sources Wettenhovi-Aspa produced, as his surviving artistic oeuvre is rather sporadic. In my paper I will examine Wettenhovi-Aspa's agency, his artistic practice and creativity, which manifested itself both in visual and written form in the context of contemporary European occulture.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 216: Göran Viktor Ståhle** – Södertörn University

*Learning to be Hindu: Bala Vihar as Religious Education in the Diaspora*

Bala Vihar is one of the most widespread formal programmes for Hindu children's education globally, operating in over 100 countries through Chinmaya Mission. How to teach and transmit cultural competence and knowledge to the younger generations is a vital question for many Hindus in the so called diaspora. This study examines Bala Vihar activities in Sweden through curriculum analysis and semi-structured interviews with teachers. By analysing syllabi, teaching materials, and teachers' accounts of their pedagogical choices and challenges, the study investigates how Hindu values, narratives, and ritual practice are transmitted in a secular Swedish context, and how curricula are adapted to local conditions.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 217: Gintarė Sereikaitė-Motiejūnė** – Vilnius University

*Polygamy, Piety, and Emotional Endurance: A Virtual Ethnographic Study of an Online Muslim Women's Group*

In Islam, polygamy refers to polygyny, a form of marriage in which a man may marry up to four wives. The Quran permits the practice under specific conditions, especially justice, equal treatment, and responsibility toward all wives. Historically, it has often been linked to the protection of widows and orphans, while in contemporary Muslim contexts it is shaped by legal frameworks and debates about gender and family life. Recent scholarship has examined its effects on family relationships and psychological wellbeing. Across different contexts, polygamy often appears as a demanding arrangement and a source of strain within the family. This paper explores how Muslim women use religious language and faith-based everyday practices to endure and make sense of polygamy in a women-only Facebook group. It is based on virtual ethnography conducted between 15 January and 15 July 2023 and draws on 500 posts, comments, and discussion threads selected for their reflections on polygamous life, emotional struggle, and religious interpretation. The research combines passive observation with participant observation, including comments and exchanges with group members. Using Saba Mahmood's work on piety, discipline, and ethical self-cultivation as an analytical lens, the paper argues that women often frame polygamy as a hardship, a test from God, and a difficult reality. They turn to patience, prayer, fast, attachment to the Quran, self-regulation, and advice from other women. These practices help women endure pain and give it meaning. The Facebook group thus emerges as a shared moral and interpretive space in which suffering is framed through faith and given meaning.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 219: Kristina Švábová** – Charles University Prague

*Post-Secular Death Practices in Low-Religiosity Regions of Czechia*

Death is a moment of crisis that typically heightens the need to engage with the idea of transcendence. Churches and other religious institutions have historically assumed the roles of mediators in such moments, overseeing funerary practices and related rites. Twentieth-century processes of modernization and secularization contributed to the sequestration and institutionalization of death, a trend further intensified in Communist Czechoslovakia through anti-religious policies. Today, most funerals in Czechia take the form of cremation and often do not involve any ceremony at all. Nevertheless, new commercial products and services have emerged that suggest a continuing need for meaningful commemorative activities that may be described as religious. These practices are examined in this ethnographic study conducted in the north-west regions of Czechia, formerly known as the Sudetenland, which show extremely low levels of religiosity. The practices observed include digitalized interactive columbaria, virtual memorials, products made from ashes, hair, or fingerprints of the deceased, 3D-printed memorial artwork, and booths designed to facilitate farewells to deceased pets. These commercial yet personalized products demonstrate the post-secular manifestations in regions commonly described as irreligious, as well as revealing a shift in ritual authority to commercial actors, artists and bereaved individuals.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 220: Eslam Alaa ElBahlawan** – University of Bayreuth

*Between Tradition and Transformation: Sufi Mawlid Celebrations and the Dynamics of Devotion, Identity, and Society in Egypt*

Sufism has had a longstanding presence throughout Egypt, extending across many regions and cultures. The various Sufi orders (*turuq*) differ in their origins, practices, and historical contexts, reflecting cultural and social variety. This research focuses on Mawlid celebrations across Egyptian societies, accentuating these events as multidimensional social gatherings. The celebrations are characterised by colourful displays, communal meals, family activities, and participation by all age groups. Urban and rural communities often have distinct traditions of celebrating Mawlid, which reflect their social environments and historical experiences. Many aspects are important to study when examining these celebrations, with material religion being one of them. This includes ritual objects, sacred spaces, performances, and artistic expressions that contribute to shaping the devotional experience. Equally important are the social dimensions, which encompass relationships involving gender, age, urban and rural traditions, social hierarchies, and other community groups. Together, these dimensions provide an understanding of the diverse natures of Mawlid in Egypt. These celebrations are not only spiritual occasions but also social events that strengthen community bonds and generate economic activity through local markets, food sales, and associated festivities. The economic dimension is significant, involving trade, community initiatives, and livelihoods shaped by the networks and mobilisation capacities associated with these events. Drawing on case studies from overall Egypt, this presentation examines Mawlid from a 360-degree perspective, looking at how the celebrations engage issues of identity, authority, social change, and economic impact, and showing their role as spiritual, social, political, and economic phenomena within contemporary Muslim life.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 221: Ondřej Váňa** – Charles University, Prague

*Divination as Symbolic Worldview in 1st Millenium BC Mesopotamia*

My lecture will examine the symbolic worldview of *Šumma ālu*, a 1st Millenium BC Mesopotamian omen compendium. I will attempt to expound the cultural expectations of ancient scholars that informed the worldview presented in the omen compendium, with a particular focus on the ideas of liminality and transgression, external representation of the interior, the androcentric social hierarchy, and the power dynamics of sexual relations. The semantic code of *Šumma ālu* maps the basic categories of lived space and gender into a normative model of order and transgression. As a tool of scribal imagination, it translates anxiety about physical and social boundaries into authoritative statements on fate. The omens were rooted in the specific biases and ideas of its authors on what constitutes the boundary between Oneself and the Other, between ritual purity and proper conduct on the one hand, taboo and deviation on the other, and what kind of social hierarchy is compatible with life itself.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 222: Alfons H. Teipen** – Furman University, Greenville, SC

*A Synoptic Reading of the Battle of Badr: Early Biographies of Muhammad and Their Authors*

The Battle of Badr is the most significant battle fought by Muḥammad and the early Muslim community. Early biographies portray the events before, during, and after the battle in very similar fashion, yet small, subtle differences in the narrations point to divergent interpretations of the event and its broader context. Specifically, each narration is reflective of the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the authors who wrote their accounts in late Umayyad and early Abbasid times.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 226: Leonid Sevastianov** – KU Leuven

*Three Epochs of Old Believer Antichristology: From Active Resistance to Eschatological Flight and the Return of Institutional Activism (1666–Present)*

This paper proposes a tripartite periodization of Antichristological discourse within Russian Old Belief, charting its evolution across three distinct phases shaped by ecclesiastical schism, political upheaval, and shifting eschatological expectations. The first period (1666–1694) is characterized by militant resistance, wherein the Nikonian reforms were actively confronted, and the Antichrist was perceived as an imminent but still resistible enemy – a force that could be challenged through steadfast confession and, if necessary, martyrdom. The second period (1694–1862) marks a profound shift toward eschatological pessimism. Following the failure of early resistance, the Antichrist was definitively recognized as having already taken power in the world through the illegitimate state authority and the Nikonian Church. Consequently, any active struggle was deemed theologically futile; the sole imperative was spiritual flight and geographical retreat from the polluted realm. This paradigm directly motivated the mid-18th-century establishment of monastic and lay settlements in Bukovina – notably at Belaya Krinitsa, Klimautsy, and Brăila – which became the cradle of future Old Believer institutional life and, ironically, the very territories where a new hierarchy would later emerge. The third period (1862–present) begins with a radical hermeneutical reversal: the Okruzhnoe Poslanie (Circular Epistle) of 1862, which effectively proclaimed that the Antichrist had either not yet come, or that he was actively conquerable through legitimate ecclesiastical structures. This theological maneuver dramatically diminished the perceived ontological power of the eschatological adversary while simultaneously augmenting the community's agency for church restoration and political engagement. Within this third period, the Belokrinitskaya hierarchy (restored in 1846 and hermeneutically legitimized by the 1862 Epistle) experienced a century of institutional activism. Its leading apologists – Arseny Ural, Innokenty Usov, and Fyodor Melnikov – championed the possibility of overcoming the Antichrist's reign through hierarchical order and, initially, through alignment with a restored Orthodox state. However, the 1917 revolutions and the Civil War forced them into Romanian exile, where Usov eventually became Metropolitan of Belaya Krinitsa. Confronting the Soviet "Red Dragon," they reinterpreted atheist state power as the ultimate Antichrist. The culmination came in 1946, when Soviet troops dismantled the hierarchy and the Belokrinitsky Metropolitan himself fled to Brăila – an act that paradoxically confirmed, within the very framework of the activist third period, the perceived Antichrist essence of Bolshevik godless power. I argue that the logical conclusion of this entire eschatological trajectory is found in the teaching of Sebastian Ozersky, the abbot of the Belokrinitsky monastery. In the late Soviet period, Ozersky articulated a final prophecy that synthesized the entire previous tradition: he predicted the imminent destruction of the USSR and the coming of the Antichrist in the year 1992. This prophecy represents the ultimate attempt to anchor the centuries-old Antichrist narrative in a concrete, datable historical event – and its failure (as 1992 passed without the eschatological consummation) effectively closed the cycle of classical Old Believer Antichristology. Thus, the optimism born in 1846 expired not only in the political defeat of 1946, but also in the theological dead end of 1992. This paper argues that Old Believer eschatology is not a static dogma but a dynamic historical construct, constantly renegotiating the boundaries of divine and human agency, and ultimately revealing its own internal limits when confronted with the unyielding flow of empirical history.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 227: Daniela Jivi** – West University, Timișoara

*Church and Imperial Authority in Byzantium: Ecclesiastical Policy and the Legitimation of Power during the Reign of Basil I the Macedonian (867–886)*

This paper examines the relationship between Church and imperial power during the reign of Basil I the Macedonian (867–886), focusing on how ecclesiastical policy contributed to the construction of political legitimacy in the Byzantine Empire. The study forms part of a broader doctoral project on Church–State relations from the reign of Basil I to that of John I Tzimiskes. The research analyses Basil I's involvement in major ecclesiastical conflicts of the period, including the internal schism between the supporters of Patriarch Ignatius and those of Patriarch Photius, as well as the so-called Photian Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches, closely connected to jurisdictional disputes between Rome and Constantinople over Bulgaria. It also considers broader aspects of imperial religious policy, such as the Christianisation of Slavic populations and the suppression of the Paulician movement. Special attention

is given to the relationship between Basil I and Patriarch Photius, as well as to the Epanagoge, compiled under his influence and promulgated at the end of the imperial reign (885–886), a text that defines the prerogatives of imperial and patriarchal authority. The analysis is based on canonical, legal, and narrative sources, interpreted in dialogue with modern scholarship. The paper argues that political legitimacy in Byzantium was constructed through the interaction between imperial authority, doctrinal conflict, and juridical-normative frameworks, highlighting the central role of ecclesiastical policy in imperial governance.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 228: Bharat Jhunjunwala** – Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore  
*The Necessity of Rebirth in the Quranic Narrative*

The mainstream Islamic understanding is that salvation takes place by living the one and only life as per the directions of Allah. Then all souls are made to stand—all of them at the same time—before Allah on the Judgment Day. We reinterpret Q 2:28, Q 40:11 and others to show that the Quran necessarily tells of each soul being made to stand individually after his/her death on the soul-specific Judgment Day. Going forward, the soul takes birth again from new parents in a new body. This cycle continues until the soul is purified and then it goes to Allah—his/her final destination. We have examined the Quranic text first, followed by authentic hadiths, lexical sources, modern Arabic linguistics, classical tafsirs, and finally contemporary commentaries. This sequence ensures fidelity to the primary sources while allowing linguistic and contextual insights to refine the interpretation. We have placed reason (*qiyās*) above consensus (*ijmāʿ*) because arriving at a consensus requires the use of reason. Our key arguments are as follows: Two lives, two deaths: The Quran tells of two lives and two deaths. The first death in loins of the fathers implies a previous life as in the word "maut." The "Punishment in the Grave" means that there is another punishment before the Judgment and, therefore, are at least three lives. Thus, "two" deaths and lives in these verses must necessarily be understood as multiple. Change of Form. The "change in likeness" in Q 56:60–62 necessarily means that the soul is not given second life in the same form. The change of form necessarily requires rebirth. Return to Allah. The Quran says that all—even the wrongdoers—will return to Him. This necessarily means that the Judgment will only send forward the wrongdoing souls to multiple rebirths until it is purified and goes to Allah. Unchanging Disposition and Eternity of Hell. Unchanging disposition and the alleged "permanency" of hell must necessarily be understood to be for a limited time because Quran explicitly says that even the evil souls will return to Allah.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 229: Bharat Jhunjunwala** – Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore  
*The Infinite God and Peace between Abrahamic Religions*

Contemporary conflicts are often driven by exclusivist interpretations of the scriptures within the Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These perspectives foster attitudes of superiority, contributing to inter-religious tensions and violence. All the three religions recognize multiple levels of Divine. The highest Level 1 of the incomprehensible Absolute (Ein Sof, Godhead, and Ahadiyyah) is explicated mainly in the mystical traditions though entirely consistent with the scriptural texts. At Level 2 is the Infinite God (Elohim, Deus ad Extra, and Wahadiyyah). The Absolute is accepted by all religions as incomprehensible and undefinable. The Infinite God is considered as "exclusive" in mainstream understandings but considered to be multiple in alternative textual interpretations. This paper builds on the alternative interpretations of multiplicity of Infinite God. By invoking Cantor's theorem on the unbounded succession of infinities, the paper argues that an Infinite manifestation cannot, in virtue of being infinite, be the only one. This removes the principal bar to reading the Infinite Elohim, Deus ad Extras, and Wahadiyyahs as plural within a single Absolute. This implies that the Elohim, Deus ad Extras, and Wahadiyyahs of other Abrahamic religions are at par with one's own Infinite God. Rather than relying on external values like peace or humanism, this paper argues that we must focus on internal universalist understanding of the scriptures to foster mutual understanding and

an attitude of humility towards other Abrahamic religions and dilute the theological basis of religious conflicts.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 230: Eugen Ciurtin** – RSHR & Institute for the History of Religions, Romanian Academy, Bucharest

*A Vortex Not for Everyone: the History of Religions in Bucharest, 1996-(2018-)2026-?*

A history of academic study of religions in Romania after 1989, however concise, has not yet been written. Fortunately, all the priority elements are public and the other essential elements can be easily recapitulated from correspondence conducted with hundreds of colleagues in the country and thousands of colleagues on all continents, mainly for the founding, consolidation and perpetuated existence of *Archaeus. Studies in the History of Religions*, *Studia Asiatica*, *International Journal for Asian Studies* and the Institute for the History of Religions of the Romanian Academy, founded in 1996, 2000 and 2008. My talk will present the milestones in the evolution of the *Archaeus Association | Romanian Association for the History of Religions | Society for the History of Religions*, meaning these 30 years just ended, in Bucharest, with a particular emphasis on the fact that the same team (almost) initiated and organized, through collaboration with EASR (since 2002) and IAHR (since 2005), two international congresses of the discipline in Bucharest: 6<sup>th</sup> EASR/IAHR Special Conference 2006 and the current one.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 232: Laura Wickström** – The Polin Institute, Åbo Akademi University  
*Ecology, Ontology, and Stewardship: A Dialogue Between Descola and Islamic Eco-Theology*

This paper draws on Philippe Descola's short anthropological book, *The Ecology of Others* (translated from the French by Geneviève Godbout and Benjamin P. Luley, 2012), to explore how his view of ecology aligns with environmental discourses in Islam, also called Islamic eco-theology or eco-Islam. Schwencke's (2012) typology of seven categories, the only comprehensive overview of eco-Islam so far, will be used as an analytical frame. The working hypothesis is that these categories, developed in the early 2010s, do not fully capture the field today. Over the past fifteen years, eco-Islam has expanded significantly, introducing new actors, interdisciplinary approaches, and transdisciplinary themes that challenge the completeness of Schwencke's framework. Descola's main argument in *The Ecology of Others* is to challenge the long-standing Western idea that humans are separate from the natural world. This more closely aligns with Islamic eco-theology than it contradicts it. Classical Islamic philosophy posits that humans are above nature due to their higher rank; however, they are not separated from nature and are bound to it by responsibilities such as khalifah. Through Descola's four ontologies (naturalism, animism, totemism, and analogism), this paper will analyze similar correlations and contradictions with contemporary eco-Islam. Some ideas are easier to correlate, such as the notions that nature is meaningful and that the relationship with the environment is ethical. Notions that contradict this include strict Islamic monotheism and the Islamic starting point of revelation, as Descola draws from multiple worldviews.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 233: Guido Nerger** – University of Bern  
*Feeding on Immortality: Are the Gods the Ideal Vegetarians?*

In discussions of the emergence of ethical and philosophical 'vegetarianism' in ancient Greece, one aspect has been completely overlooked thus far: What role did ancient conceptions of the gods play in the development of vegetarian ideas within ancient Greek philosophy? Should any specific features of ancient conceptions of the gods—such as the ambrosial food of the gods that confers immortality—be regarded as historical-religious or theological starting points and contextual conditions for the emergence of ancient vegetarianisms, particularly its philosophical form? Consequently, the argument is typically made ex negativo: the philosophical critique of the ancient cult of blood sacrifice, for example, in the context of the Pythagorean communities, is regarded as a general starting point for ancient vegetarianism. Yet even this philosophical critique is oriented ad positivum towards an ideal (whether

explicitly articulated or merely implied): the gods and their immortal lifestyle, grounded in their immortalising diet. What do we know about this immortalising diet of the gods, as imagined in antiquity and portrayed, for example, in epic and mythological poetry, in the visual arts, or in philosophy, in short, within the broad cultural framework of ancient Greek religion? And are there parallels between Greek and Indian conceptions of the gods?

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 234: Jenna Kuronen** – University of Helsinki

*Holy Milk: Constructing the Sacred and Justifying Nonhuman Animal Exploitation*

Milk and its production have played a significant role in Finnish food culture since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finland has long been among the leading countries in milk consumption, and milk remains a central element of Finnish national identity. In my doctoral research, I explore how milk is constructed as something beyond mere nutrition, and what kinds of sacred qualities are attributed to it. This approach expands the concept of the sacred beyond traditional religious frameworks, examining how national and cultural forms of sacredness can emerge without reliance on institutional religion. I analyze how these sacred-like constructions function as mechanisms of justification that both normalize the exercise of power over nonhuman animals. Drawing on social media data produced by farmers and industry actors, this paper presents preliminary findings on how milk is set apart from other foods and comes to resemble something akin to the sacred.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 235: Terhi Hannola** – University of Helsinki

*How to study (non)religious multispecies relations within the study of religion?*

In my PhD project on multispecies relations in farmed animal sanctuaries, the question I have most frequently encountered is: What does the study of religion have to do with this? While research within the study of religion has long examined topics that are (non)religious and intersect with for example, broader ethical concerns, multispecies relations still appear to sit uneasily within conventional understandings of the field. This paper outlines the approaches I use to bring together the study of religion and human–animal studies. I situate this work within the field of worldview studies, where a worldview is understood as a set of endeavors to answer "big questions." Sanctuary work provides a rich site for exploring such questions; particularly those concerning what constitutes the good and what actions should be taken to achieve it. By applying a multispecies approach to these "big questions," I argue that understandings of desirable multispecies coexistence form a crucial dimension of contemporary worldviews, especially in an era marked by ecological crises such as biodiversity loss. Rather than focusing on explicit worldview identifications and or how they shape people's understandings of desirable multispecies relations, this paper demonstrates how embodied practices, such as volunteering in farmed animal sanctuaries, provide opportunities to negotiate worldview-related questions regarding desirable multispecies coexistence.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 236: Irene Dietzel** – University of Potsdam

*The Pedagogy of Undisciplining: on Teaching Religions in a 'schoolish' Environment*

It may be the hallmark of religious studies to bend disciplinary order. There are indeed plenty of rationales for "undisciplining" the study of religion, with promising concepts from world-view-studies, biosemiotics and onto-epistemology (comp. Stuckrad 2023). How does this epistemic agility translate into the realm of education? What pedagogical implications does it hold for the socialisation of future scholars, of future thinkers more broadly? This presentation reflects on the significance of disciplines for secondary education. Schools continue to be institutions of disciplinarity, where knowledge acquisition is organised into distinct subjects, their curricula constituting concrete forms of knowledge canonisation. At the same time, contemporary didactics and educational reforms encourage transdisciplinarity and project learning. How will the diverse approaches to religious education fair in

this development? The paper addresses these questions in the light of Paul Feyerabend's Pedagogy of Irritation, while it draws on the presenter's experience as secondary school teacher.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 237: Jacek Skup** – Jagiellonian University, Kraków

*Buddhism in Modi's Political Strategy: Soft Power, Hindutva, and the Limits of Religious Diplomacy*

The paper examines Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strategic deployment of Buddhism in Indian politics, both domestically and internationally, against the backdrop of Hindutva ideology. Since 2014, under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Modi has reframed Buddhism as an integral part of India's ancient heritage, blending it with Hindu nationalist narratives to project a unified cultural identity. Domestically, initiatives like promoting Bodhi Gaya and declaring Buddha Purnima a national holiday serve to appeal to neo-Buddhist Dalit communities and counter perceptions of religious exclusion, yet they coexist uneasily with Hindutva's emphasis on Hindu primacy, which sometimes leads to minority alienation and communal tensions. Internationally, Buddhism functions as a cornerstone of India's soft power diplomacy, particularly through the "Act East" policy. Modi has leveraged symbolic gestures—such as visits to Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka, Japan, and Mongolia—to foster strategic partnerships, offset China's influence in Asia, and enhance economic ties via shared heritage narratives. Events like the Global Hindu-Buddhist Initiative underscore this approach, positioning India as a peaceful connector in a region marked by geopolitical rivalries. The paper will provide an analysis and assessment of aforementioned efforts focusing on their effects and limitations in both foreign and internal policies, while attempting to determine the place of Buddhism in the Hindu nationalist politics in contemporary India.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 239: Peter Nynäs** – Research Director, Centre of excellence in Research in Religion and social Exclusion (RelEx), Åbo Akademi University

*Challenges and Dissonance in Research with Vulnerable and Hard-to-Reach Populations*

Research on religion and worldviews has disproportionately centered populations from Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Developed (WEIRD) countries, creating significant gaps in our understanding of marginalized communities. As societies become increasingly diverse—culturally, linguistically, and in terms of worldviews—but also as a result of growing socio-economic differences, empirical research that challenges this bias is essential. However, moving beyond WEIRD-centric approaches requires more than acknowledging geographic or cultural categories; it demands critical reflection on how our methodological choices, ethical frameworks, and researcher positionalities shape knowledge production and whose voices remain heard or silenced.

From the perspective of my international project on religion and social exclusion, I examine the inherent complexities of conducting research with vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations: building trust across power differences while maintaining ethical rigor; ensuring voluntary participation and safeguarding privacy in contexts where legal frameworks like GDPR and national ethical legislation serve simultaneously as protections and obstacles; and developing sustainable, valid, and reliable methods that genuinely center marginalized experiences rather than reproducing academic hegemonies throughout research projects. Key questions guide our focus in this session: How do we define and sample non-WEIRD populations without reinforcing their marginalization? How can researchers and participants develop shared epistemic ground? What does "safety" mean for both participants and researchers in diverse fieldwork contexts? How can research practices embody decolonial principles from preparation through practice, moving beyond performative gestures toward substantive engagement with community knowledge and priorities? Through examining concrete empirical research, fieldwork experiences, and collaborative approaches, this presentation addresses the epistemic dissonance that arises when academic research paradigms encounter complex, intersectional realities that risk compromising validity.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 241: Albin Jose** – Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus

*Trade Winds and Sacred Stones: Mobility, Translation, and the Syncretic Architectures of Kochi's Mercantile Networks*

The architectural landscape of Kochi, functions not only as a creation of intercultural coexistence, but also reflects prevalent processes of transformations shaped by extensive maritime mobility. Moreover, the selective adaptations and modifications, rather than simple forms of syncretism developed the architectural structures in this port city. As a focal hub in the Indian Ocean trade network, Kochi ensured long term yet imbalanced interactions among Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Hindu communities, designed by negotiation, hierarchy, and fluctuating economic power. Analysis on sites such as the Paradesi Synagogue and early mosques, including traditional temple forms, helps the study to interpret these multi-dimensional interactions through materials, spatial edifices, and visual specifics. These structures are understood as dynamic sites where religious definitions were reshaped in relation to varying political and economic conditions, including colonial involvements of Portuguese, Dutch, and British. The new administrative frameworks and mercantile structures introduced by these colonial powers had reorganized traditional spatial layout. The study intends to emphasize architectural changes as a method for diplomacy and dominance, examining the interconnections of European powers with local maritime networks. The paper also draws attention to instants of tension within these shared environments, challenging idealized narratives of co-occurrence by emphasising disparities and exclusions. This perspective is extended to contemporary heritage initiatives, particularly the Muziris Heritage Project, while generalising its complexities, also helps to reinterpret Kochi's plural past. Kochi's architectural landscape, situated within wider Indian Ocean networks, often appears as an evolving record of exchange, negotiation, and reinterpretation shaped by the sea.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 241: Davide Torri** – Sapienza University of Rome  
*Female Deities and Spirits of the Hindu Kush Himalaya as Ecological Stewards*

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region, often referred to as the "Third Pole," is not merely a collection of geological formations but a vibrant sacred geography where the lines between the numinous and the natural are deeply blurred. This paper explores the pervasive role of female deities and indigenous spirits ranging from the fierce *Lha-mo* to localized fairy mountain queens as the primary custodians of the wilderness. In the high-altitude rangelands and glacial valleys, these feminine entities are perceived not as distant myths, but as active stewards of the cryosphere, forests and high pastures. Through a complex system of "sacred prohibitions" (rituals and taboos), they regulate human interaction with fragile ecosystems. By examining the intersection of Himalayan cosmology and traditional ecological knowledge, this study argues that the veneration of these female protectors has historically functioned as an informal yet rigorous framework for environmental conservation. In an era of rapid climatic shift and biodiversity loss, understanding these "keepers of the wild" offers critical insights into culturally grounded models of resilience and stewardship.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 243: Ullrich R. Kleinhempel** – University of the Free State, Bloemfontein / University of Münster  
*Religion and Film: Films as Medium of Aesthetics of Religion*

The presentation of religion in film can be regarded as a form of cultural reception of religion in its specific forms and traditions in society. This may be distinguished from documentary films on religions, and from religious films in the service of promoting specific religions. Films may present a religion, or specific spirituality based on it, on the level of content, in systematic and historical aspects, of symbolism, and of aesthetics. They can provide experiential access to the realm of a specific religion, atmospherically and aesthetically, and incite a viewer to delve into this semiotic realm, to attain deepened understanding. Theoretically, such films can fulfill a role in the approach of 'Aesthetics of Religion', by providing access to the modes of perception, experience, feeling, imagery, and symbolism, even aesthetics and values, of a specific religion. Examples of such films have attained international

recognition and prizes. Examples are: ‘Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?’ (1989), a South Korean film, written and produced by Bae Yong-kyun, professor in Seoul, and long-time practitioner of Zen. More recently, ‘The Island (Остров) (2006), directed by Pavel Lungin and written by Dmitry Sobolev, depicts motifs and the spirituality of Russian Orthodox mystical tradition of Hesychasm, several levels. Its analysis serves as introduction to the ‘Aesthetics of Religion’ in the medium of film, on several levels. The success and appreciation of such films, may be attributed to the specific functions they fulfill in this regard. The panel invites contributions on this realm.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 244: Elena Romashko** – University of Göttingen / University of Marburg  
*Impossible Research? Rethinking Empirical Research in Hard-to-Access and Precarious Contexts*

In recent years, empirical research in the study of religion has increasingly encountered situations in which access to the field becomes restricted, politicized, or outright dangerous. Wars, authoritarian shifts, visa denials, surveillance, institutional pressure, rise in research costs and ethical risks to interlocutors have rendered certain contexts inaccessible or unsafe for empirical work. At the same time, if research projects in hard-to-access contexts are simply abandoned, entire regions risk becoming blank spots in our knowledge production, reinforcing the domination of Western-centered perspectives that the discipline has long sought to critically overcome. Scholars working with hard-to-access communities face sudden disruptions that fundamentally challenge their projects, methods, and even professional trajectories. This roundtable addresses the problem of “impossible research”: What happens when the field closes? How can scholars continue empirical work when physical access becomes unsafe, ethically problematic, or legally restricted? Do methodological shifts towards autoethnography, digital ethnography, diasporic fieldwork, collaborative or remote research, offer viable alternatives, and where do they reach their limits? Beyond methodological adaptation, the discussion will focus on structural questions. What institutional support is needed when projects collapse due to geopolitical developments? How should funding agencies, academic institutions and research groups respond to high-risk research environments? What responsibilities do we carry toward research participants when visibility may endanger them? By bringing together scholars with experience in restricted or conflict-affected contexts, this roundtable aims to foster collective reflection on vulnerability, creativity, and responsibility in contemporary study of religion. Rather than treating interrupted research as individual misfortune or failure, we propose to examine it as a structural condition—and to develop shared strategies for navigating it.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 245: Joanna Gruszevska** , Jagiellonian University, Kraków  
*Ancient Arguments Entering Modern Debate: Reuse of Buddhist Arguments on Caste in Modern Discourses*

This paper explores the re-use of ancient Buddhist critiques of caste hierarchy in modern intellectual, social, and political debates. Focusing on selected canonical and post-canonical Buddhist sources, the analysis highlights the flexibility of Buddhist textual resources in modern debates. Particular interest would be directed to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century interpretations of the story of conversion of a low-caste girl who becomes a Buddhist nun from the Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna, a narrative story being a part of a Sanskrit 2<sup>nd</sup> century narrative collection Divyavadāna, in the writings of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Rabindranath Tagore. By contrast, the paper also addresses a modern recontextualisation of Buddhist material that serves to reinforce Brahmanical discourse, focusing on the placement of certain verses from the twenty-sixth chapter of the Dhammapada (“Brāhmaṇa”) in selected Birla temples.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 246: Torsten Janson** , Lund University  
*Queering Mythology as Artistic/Devotional Third Space*

This paper examines re-readings of Old-Turkic mythology among new actors in contemporary Turkey. These engagements reconnect mythological figures, symbols, narratives, and aesthetics with historical

and ritual legacies beyond national-state appropriation and right-wing masculinist heroism. Drawing on history activism, devotion, and art—circulating through books, illustration, webpages, video casts, and exhibitions—the paper approaches mythology as a queer(ing) field of devotional and historical imagination.

Reworkings of mythological imaginaries open, to extrapolate from Homi Bhabha, “third spaces” where artistic, spiritual, and historical practices intersect beyond religious–secular binaries, heteronormativity, and nationalist authority. While the actors involved are typically aligned with secularist outlooks, their practices nonetheless engage spiritual themes, ritual sensibilities, and cosmological imaginaries, reworked in non-triumphalist and non-institutional forms. In doing so, they imagine modes of devotion and historical belonging that exceed Turkey’s entrenched polarisation between “religious” and “secular” camps.

The queering of mythology is further characterised by its transboundary orientation. Drawing on a fluid Turkic field spanning Chinese, Mongolian, Anatolian, Persian, Kurdish, and Hellenic legacies, it negotiates animistic, shamanistic, and folkloristic repertoires alongside globalised visual idioms. The field itself contains tensions between historically informed re-activations of mythology and a broader cultural mainstream shaped by homogenised Euro-Hellenic gender codes. Rather than merely referencing established canons, such practices give rise to hybridised and living archives of meaning and critique. Queer(ing) mythology here names a practice of undoing mythological ownership: unsettling masculinist, heteronormative, and nationalist imaginaries by recasting heritage as a transboundary and generative field open to critical re-reading, artistic invention, and transgressive devotion.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 247: Dániel Vékony** , Corvinus University of Budapest  
*Religious Governance in Central Europe: On a Road of Symphonization?*

This paper examines the evolving relationship between religion and politics across post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. Following the fall of communist regimes—characterized by forced secularization and the repression of religious life—most states experienced a resurgence of religiosity and the re-entry of religion into the public and political spheres.

In practical politics, dominant religions are frequently instrumentalized. Traditional Christian institutions serve as symbols, tools, and amplifiers for the civilizational messages of nationalist-populist governments. These regimes use traditional religion to contrast their societies with a Western Europe they characterize as overly liberal and decadent. This study provides an overview of state–religion governance transformations since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It demonstrates how various states formalized hierarchical systems that privilege “traditional” religions through concordats, legal recognition tiers, and selective financial support. Such frameworks reinforce inequalities among religious groups and enable states to regulate access to the public sphere.

The paper argues that populist-nationalist governments have co-opted traditional churches to strengthen state religious identity and gain legitimacy as protectors of Christian society. Finally, the analysis evaluates whether the increasingly asymmetric interdependence between traditional churches and states in the region constitutes a form of symphonia, as conceptualized by Mikhail Antonov. For Antonov, symphonia represents the voluntary subordination of the church to state power in exchange for financial benefits and the authority to define moral norms. This paper explores if “symphonization” accurately describes the interdependent relationships emerging between traditional churches and political elites across the post-communist landscape.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 249: Tóth Judit Lenke** , University of Pécs  
*What is religious data? Belief as data in digital society: knowability, inference, and profiling*

Data relating to religious beliefs are classified as special categories of personal data under the GDPR, the processing of which is, as a general rule, prohibited. At the same time, the regulation does not clearly define what counts as religious data, nor does it explain when and how religious identity becomes

knowable as data. This paper takes that conceptual uncertainty as its starting point and examines how belief, as an internal and not directly observable domain, is transformed into data in digital society.

The paper argues that the knowability of religious data can be understood on three levels. First, there is declared religious data, when an individual explicitly communicates their religious affiliation or belief. Second, there is data arising from religious practice, generated through participation, communication, pastoral relations, and the everyday life of religious communities. Third, and most importantly, there is inferred religious data: data produced not by direct declaration, but by behavioural patterns, media consumption, platform activity, and algorithmic correlation.

The central claim of the paper is that in digital society belief no longer appears only as a religious or inward spiritual category, but increasingly becomes data that can be profiled and reconstructed. This creates a fundamentally new situation, since religious identity may become accessible to actors who previously remained outside the autonomous sphere of religious communities. Religious data should therefore be understood not merely as a subtype of special categories of personal data, but as a distinct category situated at the intersection of religious freedom, data protection, and digital visibility. The paper concludes that the concept of religious data cannot be reduced to a legal definition alone, but requires a broader rethinking in religious studies, social theory, and philosophy.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 250: Angela De Maria** , Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow, PI of [TransIslam project](#), Department of History, Anthropology, Religions, Art, Performing Arts, Sapienza University of Rome

*Ottoman Manuscripts in Translation: The Fonds des traductions and Early Modern European Understandings of Islam*

By presenting the preliminary results of the ongoing MSCA project TransIslam, this paper focuses on a group of religious texts from the Fonds des traductions (BnF, Paris), a wide-ranging corpus of over 120 manuscripts, each containing the transcription of an Ottoman text together with its French translation. Unlike other early modern European collections of Oriental manuscripts, this corpus represents the earliest example of a collective and systematic enterprise of Ottoman text translation, deliberately planned, coordinated, and financed by the French government prior to the emergence of late eighteenth-century “academic” Orientalism. Commissioned between 1730 and 1753 from the jeunes de langues (apprentice dragomans trained to serve as official interpreters in Franco-Ottoman relations), these manuscripts were intended to enrich the Oriental collections of the Parisian Bibliothèque du Roi.

Rather than regarding the corpus merely as a repository of Ottoman religious texts, this study assumes that each manuscript has its own history (including text selection, translation, and transmission to Paris), allowing for an investigation of what kind of Islam was translated, how it was interpreted, and whether it was adapted to a European Christian cultural context under the influence of the sociocultural background of the apprentice dragomans, both as individuals and as a state-employed community of interpreters.

While also shedding light on the largely unexplored role of dragomans as religious mediators (overshadowed by their better-known diplomatic and cultural functions), this paper focuses on their translations, generally overlooked despite dragomans being considered translators par excellence, in order to examine the contribution of Ottoman texts to the European understandings of Muslims.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 251: Veronika Eufinger** , Institute for Social Research of the Protestant Church in Germany, Hannover

*The Protestant Church in Germany: Reconstructing a Socially Selective Opportunity Structure for Voluntary Engagement*

In the German Survey on Volunteering (Freiwilligensurvey, FWS), volunteering is highlighted as a “key pillar of society,” a contribution to “social cohesion,” and as “indispensable for a functioning and vibrant democracy.” In Germany, Christian churches have traditionally been central providers of such

voluntary engagement: In 2022, more than 900,000 volunteers were active within the Protestant Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD), a figure that far exceeds its approximately 239,000 paid employees.

Churches, in the form of local congregations, function as comprehensive points of access for voluntary engagement. Central in this regard are the “favorable opportunity structures that the Protestant Church provides for voluntary engagement (places, spaces, contact persons, opportunities)” (Pickel 2015). Particularly in rural areas, where civil society organizations are sparsely distributed, churches provide a reliable point of contact.

Church membership functions as a form of social capital: according to the sixth Church Membership Survey (Kirchenmitgliedschaftsuntersuchung, KMU), 46% of Protestant church members were engaged in voluntary work in 2023, compared to only 32% among the non-affiliated. However, the data also indicate that opportunities for volunteering are taken in a socially selective manner along educational lines: While 47% of volunteers have at least a university entrance qualification, this applies to only 37% of non-volunteers, who are also in a significantly more disadvantaged economic position (Wunder, Ahrens, Eufinger 2024).

Based on the quantitative data of the current KMU, this paper reconstructs not only the extent, motivations, and fields of voluntary engagement within the Protestant Church in Germany, but also the effects of social selectivity among volunteers and in civic engagement.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 252: Jussi Pietinalho** , University of Turku

*Western Christian Traditions and Egalitarianism: A Conceptual Analysis of Doctrines with Indicative Evidence from Party Programmes and Electoral Behaviour*

Cross-national analyses of the relationship between religious traditions and economic egalitarianism remain limited, partly due to the absence of context-independent measures of egalitarianism. Another limitation concerns the overly coarse classification of Protestantism, which is frequently treated as a single category, rarely distinguishing between Lutheran and Reformed branches, and even less often between Calvinist and Arminian traditions within the Reformed tradition. This study pursues three objectives: (1) to develop a context-independent measure of economic egalitarianism; (2) to clarify doctrinal differences among Christian traditions regarding egalitarianism; and (3) to examine empirically the associations between Christian traditions and economic egalitarianism. The proposed measure builds on Downs’ theory of voting, replacing the conventional left–right dimension with an egalitarianism dimension. Country-level egalitarianism is estimated by linking changes in parties’ electoral support to shifts in their positions on egalitarianism, derived from party manifesto analysis provided by the MARPOR project. Doctrinal differences are assessed through a content analysis of confessional texts. Associations between Christian traditions and egalitarianism are examined using ordinary least squares regression. The results indicate that the proposed measure is promising, as it remains independent of cross-national differences in overall egalitarian levels. Content analysis reveals substantial doctrinal variation: Lutheranism demonstrates the strongest commitment to equality, whereas some strands of Arminianism exhibit the weakest. Regression analyses further show that economic egalitarianism is associated with increased electoral support in countries with sizable Lutheran populations, but decreased support in countries with substantial Catholic and Reformed (particularly Arminian) populations.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 253: Mustafa Kamal** , Linnaeus University

*From Poetic Metaphor to Polemic Insult: Shifting Vocabularies of (Non)Religion in the Pakistani Context*

Contemporary Pakistan offers a regressive landscape for relations between Muslims and atheists. Online spaces are dominated by mutual hostility in which atheists are abeled *desi mulhid* (native heretic) and subjected to accusations of blasphemy; religious believers are dismissed as narrow-minded and superstitious. The prospect of genuine dialogue, let alone friendship, appears remote. Against this backdrop, this paper turns to a largely overlooked archive: the literary friendships of mid-twentieth

century Urdu intellectual culture. Its central text is a preface written by Josh Malihabadi (1898–1982) — one of the most celebrated Urdu poet and outspoken atheists — for the work of the Sufi master Baba Zaheen Shah Taji. In this literary masterpiece, Josh articulates a relationship of profound mutual affection between two men who agree on nothing theologically, yet hold their ground and hold each other. By reading Josh's prose closely — attending to its metaphors, its rhetorical strategies, and the Urdu literary tradition it inhabits — this paper argues that what made such friendship possible was a shared language: the rich, capacious vocabulary of classical Urdu literary culture, in which the tavern and the mosque, the drunkard and the religious figure, the believer and the heretic, were necessary counterparts in a shared imaginative world. That shared language has been progressively displaced by a narrower, more legally charged vocabulary rooted in religious nationalism and digital mobilization. The paper asks what can be recovered, and what may be irrecoverably lost when the poetic gives way to the prosecutorial.

**INDIVIDUAL PAPER 254: Zahra Naghshband** , Max Weber Center, University of Erfurt

*Between Two Bodies: The Quality of Bodily Mediation in the Experience of Ritual Time in Iranian Shiite Practice*

It often seems that, to remain awake for nocturnal worship during Ramadan and still return to daily activities the next morning, one must “rent another body.” Night is a privileged time for ritual performance, yet also the only time to experience the city's nocturnal life. How, then, can a body already worn by air pollution, labor, and anxiety sustain participation in night vigils, whether at home or in collective du‘ā recitations at ritual sites?

Drawing on ethnographic data from two consecutive Ramadans (2024–2025) in Tehran and Karbala, this paper examines how the ritualized body mediates the experience of time. Among my interlocutors, the body appears in two main forms: first, as an obstacle to becoming a “proper” ritual agent due to fatigue and unruliness; and second, as an extraordinary body marked by resilience and endurance, especially during pilgrimage.

The first is more prevalent, particularly in accounts of struggling to recalibrate bodily rhythms within the frenetic pace of life in Tehran. The second emerges in retrospective narratives of pilgrimage, where a “miraculous body” comes into view. In such moments, the ritual agent, usually unable to align bodily rhythms with ritual time, displays unexpected endurance; the body may even feel light or absent, sustaining itself despite hardship. This experience is often taken as a sign of ritual efficacy: time expands and the body is empowered, especially during key occasions such as the Nights of Qadr.

Finally, I show how longing for pilgrimage, closely tied to presence, operates not only as a spatial orientation but as a mode of bodily and temporal synchronization. In contrast, in Tehran, the imperfect ritual body transforms the longing for “coming again” into the anxiety of “doing more,” often manifesting in the overperformance of ritual.