



CenSAMM



Futures and Frontiers

19-21 August 2026

Dublin City University,
All Hallows Campus

Joint Conference:

Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (ISASR)

British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR)

Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM)

Dublin City University, School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music (DCU)

Welcome

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Dublin and to the All Hallows Campus at Dublin City University. This collaborative conference brings together scholars from Ireland, the UK, and beyond, highlighting the important work being done in the academic study of religion/s. This marks the second joint conference between the British Association for the Study of Religions and the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions, the first taking place at Queen's University in Belfast in 2018. For this conference, we're grateful for the support and input from our colleagues from the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements, as well as the wider community at DCU.

This year's conference is taking place on the DCU All Hallows Campus. This centrally located campus has a long history in education, and is now one of three campuses used by the DCU community. Our plenary addresses, panels, and coffee/tea breaks will take place in Purcell House, with meals and the drinks reception being held in the restaurant located in Senior House. Car parking is free on the All Hallows Campus in the car park beside Purcell House and the one in front of Senior House – ***with the exception of spaces marked as 'pay by text'***.

If any issues arise related to the conference or programme, you can reach me at brad.anderson@dcu.ie. For health or security related issues, the Security team on the All Hallows Campus is available 24 hrs and can be reached at +353 (0)1 700 5999, or the security office in Purcell House.

Drumcondra and surrounding areas

The DCU All Hallows Campus is located in Drumcondra, on the north side of Dublin.

Information on [getting to campus can be found here](https://www.dcu.ie/travel-to-dcu/getting-to-campus) (<https://www.dcu.ie/travel-to-dcu/getting-to-campus>).

The city centre is ca. 3-4 km from the All Hallows Campus and buses run frequently in both directions. Routes and journeys for bus and other public transport options can be found [here](https://www.transportforireland.ie/plan-a-journey/) (<https://www.transportforireland.ie/plan-a-journey/>).

The conference dinner will take place on Thursday 20 August, 7pm, at the Skylon Hotel, which is a short walk from the All Hallows Campus. There are a number of very good restaurants and pubs quite near to the campus including: Restaurant 104 (traditional fare), Il Corvo (Italian), The Cat & Cage (pub with food), Shouk (middle eastern). There are also local shops nearby, including Lidl and Tesco.

Wishing everyone a memorable (in the best sense!) few days,

Brad Anderson
Dublin City University



Key contacts:

Dublin City University

Brad Anderson || brad.anderson@dcu.ie
(Conference Organiser)

ISASR Committee

Jenny Butler
James Kapaló
Alexandra Grieser

CenSAMM members

James Crossley
Justin Meggitt

BASR Committee

Paul-François Tremlett
Suzanne Owen
Aled Thomas
Stefanie Sinclair
Joseph Webster
Theodora Wildcroft
Susie Triffitt
Vishal Sangu

About ISASR

The Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions was founded on Feb 19th 2011 with an action committee comprising scholars from a wide range of disciplines, specialities and institutions. The Society held its first general meeting and elected its first regular committee on May 26th 2012. The ISASR is an association of scholars and researchers devoted to the academic study of religions within Ireland and internationally. It is a forum for the critical, analytical and cross-cultural academic study of religions, past and present and provides a space for scholarly activity across different disciplines and fields. The Society aims to foster a variety of research-related activity including e.g. conferences, seminars, workshops and publications. The ISASR is a member society of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) and the the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), the regional network for IAHR national member associations in Europe. The ISASR was welcomed into membership at the EASR's annual meeting which took place in Budapest in September 2011.

About BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) was founded in 1954 and is a member association of the International Association for the History of Religions and of the European Association for the Study of Religions. The object of BASR is to promote the academic study of religion/s, understood as the historical, social, theoretical, critical and comparative study of religion/s through the interdisciplinary collaboration of all scholars whose research is defined in this way. BASR is not a forum for confessional, apologetic, or similar concerns. BASR pursues its aims principally through an annual conference and general meeting, a regular Bulletin, and a Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions. Membership is open to all scholars normally resident in the United Kingdom.

About CenSAMM

The Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM) is based in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. It was established to promote high quality critical and academic research into apocalyptic and millenarian movements across time, place and culture. The Centre was founded by Panacea Charitable Trust trustees, Dr Naomi Hilton (University of Cambridge and Victoria University of Wellington), Prof. Justin Meggitt (University of Cambridge), and Prof. Christopher Rowland (formerly University of Oxford) in the critical study of apocalyptic and millenarian movements and aid the public understanding of the legacies and future possibilities of these crucial, creative and often misunderstood forms of human culture. CenSAMM is a non-religious and nonpartisan organisation; the Centre seeks to promote academic rigour and critical inquiry, with an inclusive and interdisciplinary scope. Its director is Prof. James Crossley (University of Cambridge and MF Oslo).

About Dublin City University

Based on Dublin's north side, DCU is proud to be one of the world's leading Young Universities, with a mission to transform lives and societies. Through education, research and innovation, DCU is focused on delivering real impact, and addressing global challenges in collaboration with our partners and stakeholders. The university serves over 20,000 students across three main academic campuses in Glasnevin and Drumcondra.

Keynote Speakers

Professor Marion Bowman

Marion Bowman is Professor Emerita in Religious Studies at The Open University where she was previously Professor of Vernacular Religion. She works on the borders of religious studies and folklore and ethnology, and has done groundbreaking research into alternative spiritualities. Her research focus is predominantly contemporary spirituality in the UK and Europe, particularly in relation to people within, on the margins of and outside institutional religion. Professor Bowman has published widely in these and other areas, and has led important projects on issues ranging from pilgrimage to vernacular religion.

Professor Oliver Scharbrodt

Oliver Scharbrodt is Professor of Islamic Studies at Lund University. His research examines modern and contemporary Islam with a particular focus on transnational Shia communities, Muslim minorities in Europe and the intersection of religion, authority and politics in the modern Muslim world. Before joining Lund, he held appointments at the University of Birmingham, University of Chester, and University College Cork. He is the author and editor of several monographs and volumes and has published widely in journals across Islamic Studies, Religious Studies and Middle Eastern Studies. His work uses Arabic and Persian sources and draws on extensive fieldwork in Europe and the Middle East.

Conference Schedule
19-21 August 2026
Dublin City University, All Hallows Campus

Wednesday 19 August

10.00-12.00	BASR Committee meeting (PGo2)
12.00-13.00	Registration (Purcell House, All Hallows Campus)
13.00-13.30	Welcome (PGo1)
13.30-15.00	Breakout Session 1
15.00-15.30	Tea & Coffee
15.30-17.00	Breakout Session 2
17.00-18.15	Keynote 1: Marion Bowman
18.15-19.00	Drinks Reception (All Hallows Restaurant, Senior House)

Thursday 20 August

08.00-09.00	Breakfast
09.30-11.00	Breakout Session 3
11.00-11.30	Tea & Coffee, pastries
11.30-13.00	Breakout Session 4
13.00-14.00	Lunch (All Hallows Restaurant, Senior House)
14.00-15.15:	Keynote 2: Oliver Scharbrodt
15.15-15.45	Tea & Coffee
15.45-17.00	BASR AGM (PGo1)
17.00-18.15	ISASR AGM (PGo2)
19.00-21.00	Conference Dinner, Skylon Hotel

Friday 21 August

08.00-09.00	Breakfast // check-out
09.30-11.00	Breakout Session 5
11.00-11.30	Tea & Coffee, pastries
11.30-13.00	Breakout Session 6
13.00-13.45	Roundtable discussion and Close of Conference
13.45-14.30	Lunch and departure (All Hallows Restaurant, Senior House)

2026 Conference Programme

Breakout Session 1 (Wed 19 Aug, 13.30-15.00)

Panel 1: Rethinking Boundaries in Religious Studies PG01 // Chair: P.-F. Tremlett 1. Mark Borthwick, 'Towards Interspecies Religious Studies via the Sedimentation of Nature-Cosmology' 2. Kristi Boone, 'Sacred Frontiers: Extending Sacralisation Framework Beyond Explicit Religion' 3. Theo Wildcroft and Aled Thomas, 'Discourses of Harm in Yoga and NRM Studies'	Panel 3: Jehovah's Witnesses: Social and Cultural Developments PG09 // Chair: G. Chryssides 1. Richard Putman, 'Watchtower Apocalypticism and Anticolonialism in Southern Africa' 2. Donald Jacobs, 'Jehovah's Witnesses, Secularisation, and Growth' 3. Lindy Lovett, 'Hidden Hierarchies: Gender, Spiritual Status, and Belonging among Jehovah's Witness Women'
Panel 2: Celticism, Paganism, Esotericism PG02 // Chair: S. Owen 1. Karina Oliveira Bezerra, 'Heterogeneity, Conflict, and Coloniality in Brazilian Celtic Paganism' 2. Jenny Butler, "'I Am One with the Twilight's Dream': Tracing Conceptual Lineages from the Celtic Revival to Modern Spiritual Movements' 3. Grace Conway, 'Esotericism, Coloniality, and the Making of Pseudoarchaeological Discourse'	Panel 4: Ecology and Beyond PG11 // Chair: M. Stringer 1. Ethna Regan, 'The Genocide-Ecocide Nexus: Perspectives from Religious and Theological Ethics' 2. Maria Nita, 'Plant Rich Diets and Green Christian Lived Ethics for Sustainable Food Futures' 3. Bettina Schmidt, 'Axé and the Interrelatedness Between Spirituality, Nature and Survival'

Breakout Session 2 (Wed 19 Aug, 15.30-17.00)

Panel 5: Roundtable: Teaching and AI PG01 // Chair: J. Powell Panellists: 1. Stefanie Sinclair 2. Joseph Webster 3. Aled Thomas 4. Hazel O'Brien	Panel 7: Millenarianism, Past and Present PG09 // Chair: J. Meggitt 1. James Crossley, 'Robin Hood's Utopia' 2. Elizabeth Eastwood Dewing, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest" (Isaiah 61:1): Elizabeth Finn, Millenarian Visions of Jewish Restoration, and the Birth of Christian Zionism' 3. Jackie Hosein, 'The 2012 Glastonbury Connection'
Panel 6: Religious Studies: Theoretical Reflections PG02 // Chair: J. Kapaló 1. Paul-François Tremlett, 'Religious Studies after Neoliberalism' 2. Edward Graham-Hyde, "In, Out, Out, In": An insider's outside observations of an outsider utilising insider experience as part of the <i>New Religiosity and the Digital Study of Eudaimonia</i> JTF-funded project' 3. Alexandra Grieser, 'What Will a Global History of Religion Look Like? – Elements of a Project'	Panel 8: Contemporary Traditions and Future-Making PG11 // Chair: O. Scharbrodt 1. Anika Kabani, 'Drawing Nearer to "American Islam": Asylum, Secular Feminism, and the Governance of Religious Futures' 2. Gazal Mathur, 'Faith, Futures, and Frontiers: Reimagining Sustainable Societies Through Religion' 3. Nduka Udeagha, 'Prophetic Authority and the Making of the Future in Nigerian Crossover Nights'

17.00-18.15

Keynote 1: Marion Bowman, 'Re-placing Religion: Locating the Spiritual in the 21st century'

PG01 // Chair: Paul-François Tremlett

Followed by drinks reception

Breakout Session 3 (Thurs 20 Aug, 09.30-11.00)

Panel 9: The Religious Landscape of Ireland PG01 // Chair: B. Anderson 1. Gladys Ganiel, 'Religion on the Island of Ireland: Futures and Frontiers' 2. Sarah Carol, Micheál Collins and Egle Gusciute, 'Religious Belonging in Ireland: Results from the European Social Survey 2002–2026' 3. Hazel O'Brien, 'The discursive place of Ireland in LDS General Conference: Visibility, memory, and belonging'	Panel 11: Traditions on the Move PG09 // Chair: M. Stringer 1. Vishal Sangu, 'How Sikhs are Using Music to Express, Negotiate, and Decolonise their identities' 2. Andrew Topping, 'Social Technologies and the Parable of the Unjust Steward' 3. Zoe Zielke, "Becoming Otherwise": Buddhism, Meditation, and the Crafting of Alternative Futures'
Panel 10: Boundaries Within and Beyond Traditions PG02 // Chair: S. Owen 1. Yitzchak Kerem, 'Boundaries of Sephardic/Mizrahi Jewish Theology, Law and Tradition' 2. Colette Colfer, 'Beyond Boundaries: Byzantine-style Iconography in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries' 3. Moojan Momen, 'Baha'I: The Consequences of Breaking Through Cultural Boundaries'	Panel 12: Jehovah's Witnesses: Futures and Frontiers PG11 // Chair: J. Webster 1. George D. Chryssides, 'Blurred Boundaries: Stakeholders in the Study of Jehovah's Witnesses' 2. Mathew N. Schmalz, 'Identifying Gog of Magog: Futures and Frontiers in Watchtower Prophetic Speculation' 3. Jason J. E. Wright, 'Consistent Eschatology: Fixed Futures among the Jehovah's Witnesses'

Breakout Session 4 (Thurs 20 Aug, 11.30-13.00)

Panel 13: Film, Media, and Religion PG01 // Chair: A. Grieser 1. Paul Clogher, 'The Porous Body of Christ: Displacement and Subversion in Pier Paolo Pasolini's <i>La Ricotta</i>' 2. Karen Wenell, 'The Second Coming of the Grinch: Neoliberal Futures of Millennial Capitalism at the Frontiers of Mediatized Religion' 3. Stefanie Sinclair, 'Filmmaking as a Creative, Participatory Practice within Academic Research'	Panel 15: History, Religion, and Geography PG09 // Chair: J. Butler 1. Erin Louise Clark, 'In Zion "we all are rich – there is no real poverty": Reclaiming Narratives of Early Working-class LDS Converts in England' 2. Suzanne Owen, 'Ossian, Merlin and the Mythical Land in Scottish Druidry' 3. Milan Reith, 'Freemasonry and the Politics of Exposure in 1980s Britain'
Panel 14: Populism, Free Speech, and Digital Culture PG02 // Chair: A Thomas 1. Jonathan Abernethy-Barkley, 'Futures of Awakening: Populism, Conspirituality, and Conversion Narratives at the Frontiers of Digital Insurgency' 2. Nicole Graham, "'Making a Tit of Yourself": A Clash of Religious Offence, Free Speech, and Satire' 3. Bethan Oake, 'Demonic bodies: sex, sexuality, and gender in Satanic moral panic discourse'	Panel 16: Apocalypse, Past and Present PG11 // Chair: J. Crossley 1. Courtney MacPhee, 'Apocalyptic Pluralism: Religious Liberty and the Propagation of the Gospel in the English Revolution' 2. Thomas Bromwell, 'At the Edge of Time: Apocalypse as a Cultural Frontier in Early Twentieth-Century British Art' 3. Scott Culpepper, 'Hidden Demons, Harbingers of Coming Catastrophes: Satanic Panic as Vernacular Apocalypse in Britain, Ireland, and the Atlantic World'

14.00-15.15

Keynote 2: Oliver Scharbrodt, 'Whose Neutrality? Postcoloniality and the Political Frontiers of Religious Studies'

PG01 // Chair: Jenny Butler

Breakout Session 5 (Friday 21 Aug, 09.30-11.00)

Panel 17: Book Panel: <i>Secularism, Race, and the Politics of Islamophobia in Europe and Beyond</i> PG01 // Chair: Sharmin Sadequee 1. Sharmin Sadequee 2. Dustin Byrd 3. Alain Gabon 4. Nakita Valerio	Panel 19: Millenarianism and Apocalypse – Contemporary Reflections PG09 // Chair: J Crossley 1. Justin J. Meggitt, 'The Apocalyptic Littoral: Conceptualising Christadelphianism' 2. Anna-Sophia M. Roy, 'The New Apostolic Reformation: a challenge to traditional binary distinctions between pre-millennialism and post-millennialism?' 3. Joseph Webster, 'Whose Future Wins Out? "Taking Seriously" Multiple Millenarian Monopolies in the Field'
Panel 18: In the Classroom: Pedagogical Reflections PG02 // Chair: S. Sinclair 1. Gary Keogh, 'Sex Education in Faith Schools: Notes from the Frontlines of (Post)Secularism' 2. Romana Meereis, 'Buddhism in English Religious Education: Its Future and the Implications of the Curriculum and Assessment Review' 3. Peter Admirand, 'Teaching Religions and Pop Culture: Integrating Jesus and the Buddha—along with The Joker and Darth Vader—in the Classroom' 4. Krittika Bhattacharjee, 'Playing with Religion: Reimagining Religious Studies in the Writing Classroom'	Panel 20: Hope on the Frontier: Productively Engaging Anthropology and Theology and the Futures they Create (CAT Panel 1) PG 11 // Chair: S. Triffitt 1. Imad Ahmed, 'Moon Wars: Hope at the Frontier?' 2. Caroline Tee, Maan Al Dabbagh, Lili Di Puppo, 'A Theology of Resilience in the End Times: Muslims and Post-apocalyptic Anthropology' 3. Stav Shufan-Biton, '"Just Follow the Magic": Religious Attitudes and Holy Time among Jews as a Religious Minority in Britain'

Breakout Session 6 (Friday 21 Aug, 11.30-13.00)

Panel 21: Hope on the Frontier: Productively engaging Anthropology and Theology and the Futures they Create (CAT Panel 2) PG01 // Chair: J. Webster 1. Susie Triffitt, 'Hope and "Home"lessness: Listening for Hope amongst the Homeless of Bradford' 2. Laure Montarry, 'Exploring 'God's Love' as a Model for a Good Christian Life in the Anglican Religion' 3. Courtney Reeve, 'Challenging Hope: A Descent into the Ordinary'	Panel 23: Religion, Conflict, and Empire PG09 // Chair: M. Bowman 1. James A. Kapaló, 'Traversing Máriapócs: The Greek Catholic Church Across Frontiers' 2. Olesia Zhytkova, 'Orthodoxy at the Frontier: Russia's Weaponisation of the Church, War and Ukraine's Resistance' 3. Hanna Kulahina-Stadnichenko, 'Religious Freedom and Its Framework in the Context of Socio-Political Transformations and War'
Panel 22: At the Boundaries of 'Religion' PG02 // Chair: A. Thomas 1. Philip Deslippe, 'Success Clubs of the Early-Twentieth Century and the Boundaries of Religion' 2. Andrew Kristoffer Dean, 'Do Atheists Daydream of Eschatological Sheep?' 3. Phillip Antilla, 'Where is Home? Pilgrimage and the Experience of Place'	Panel 24: Policy, Governance, Religion PG11 // Chair: A. Grieser 1. Yafa Shanneik, 'The Frontiers of Kinship: Genetics, Religion and the Politics of Reproduction' 2. H. Şule Albayrak, 'From Prophecy to Politics: Christian Zionism' 3. Gizem Arikan and Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom, 'The Effects of Islamic Salience in Urban Space on Muslim Immigrants' Social Trust and Sense of Belonging'

13.00-13.45

Roundtable discussion and close of conference: 'Futures of the Academic Study of Religion'

PG01 // Chair: S. Owen

Panellists: Paul-François Tremlett, Marion Bowman, Aled Thomas, Brad Anderson

Conference Abstracts

Breakout Session 1 (Wed 19 Aug, 13.30-15.00)

Panel 1: Rethinking Boundaries in Religious Studies

PG01 // Chair: P.-F. Tremlett

1. Mark Borthwick, 'Towards Interspecies Religious Studies via the Sedimentation of Nature-Cosmology'

Religious studies has long struggled to root out a methodological anthropocentrism so deep as to be largely invisible: the field's objects of inquiry are typically human communities, texts, rituals, and beliefs. While the animist turn and multispecies ethnography have done important work extending agency to non-human actors, multispecies ethnography still tends to privilege "lively encounters" (Swanson) and dyadic sensory interactions in ways that can reduce animal worlds to moments of intimate encounter with humans. Additionally, valuable contributions from the animist turn have not been systematically applied within religious studies, specifically to the question of how non-human beings co-produce religious traditions, as opposed to being subjects of human cosmological attention. This paper explores how animals are participants in the production of traditions, knowledges, and spiritual worlds, with a focus on ceremony and tradition. I argue that non-human organisms are co-authors of the religious narratives humans tell about them and with them, understanding traditions as somatically co-produced, with content, timing, and meaning arise from a sympoietic entanglement between human and animal bodies over generations. The theoretical orientation comes from theoretical sedimentation: how meanings produced through active intentional acts sink into the substrate of consciousness and thereafter operate passively, structuring subsequent experience without being thematised (Husserl), are carried into the lively body through perception and action (Merleau-Ponty), and accumulate nature-religious sensibility in layers across generations (Taylor). The key contribution of this paper is to identify that this multispecies conversation and somatic archiving goes both ways -just as domestication shapes the body of the domestic species (tamed dog, cultivated wheat, farmed salmon), the species simultaneously domesticates the human mind, body, and verbal folkway. The millennia of human eating, fasting, and ceremony have sedimented into both party's own evolutionary and ecological history, producing a shared archive in which neither party is simply the author and neither simply the text. Through this mechanism, non-human organisms are sympoietic co-authors of religious traditions, and the corpus of religion is another 'domesticated' domain in the trophic interspecies culture.

2. Kristi Boone, 'Sacred Frontiers: Extending Sacralisation Framework Beyond Explicit Religion'

When Reform UK frames 'our way of life' as something to be defended against desecration, or Rassemblement National describes *laïcité* as inviolable, the grammar of the sacred is operating in discourse that explicitly disavows religious identity. These are not religious movements, which is precisely the analytical problem. Existing frameworks often look for religion and, finding none, stop. This paper presents work in progress on extending a three-dimensional

sacralisation framework, developed through analysis of Christian nationalist discourse, into European far-right contexts Drawing on parliamentary debate, manifestos, and party media, it tracks how sacred language evolves and how boundary enforcement operates as explicitly religious register gives way to culturally neutral formulations. This paper argues that this utility in avowedly secular spaces directly challenges the boundaries of 'religion' itself: what appears as religion's return to European politics may instead be its grammar without its content, whilst still wielding the power of the sacred.

3. Theo Wildcroft and Aled Thomas, 'Discourses of Harm in Yoga and NRM Studies'

Current research in the fields of yoga and NRM studies faces challenges from two artificial divides. Firstly, the study of new religiosity is often siloed into area studies that over-emphasise divisions between communities with common processes, issues and concerns. And secondly, the emic-etic divide is, in mainstream discourse, exaggerated into accusations of apologism or anti-cult rhetoric, aimed at researchers and activists respectively. This was most visible in the 'cult wars' of the 1970s/80s - yet remains in play in twenty-first century discourse. Indeed, as the neoliberalisation of the university intensifies, the positionality of scholars engaged in research with these organisations and communities has only become more complex. This has significant implications for the research into harm and spiritual abuse (Oakley 2013), which has often been neglected in both fields. This paper will problematise these artificial divides, arguing that issues of the emic and etic have created unhelpful binaries for both NRM and yoga studies, obscuring common processes and discourses. Drawing on Robertson's model of epistemic capital (2021), as well as Dubrow-Marshall's concept of 'cult' as an epistemic key (2024), we will revisit the cult/anti-cult discourse to argue that the work of cult studies allows survivors to validate experiential understandings, and bring discussions of real harm into the academic and cultural discourse space.

Panel 2: Celticism, Paganism, Esotericism

PG02 // Chair: S. Owen

1. Karina Oliveira Bezerra, 'Heterogeneity, Conflict, and Coloniality in Brazilian Celtic Paganism'

Since the 1970s, contemporary Celtic religion has found a foothold in Brazil, initially represented by Meso-Druidry, then Neo-Druidry, and later Celtic Reconstructionism. Despite Brazil's status as one of the most racially diverse nations, challenges to colonial mentalities have emerged only in recent years. Until recently, practitioners often mirrored their European and American counterparts, hesitant to carve out a distinct Brazilian identity within Celtic Paganism. A significant turning point occurred at the 9th Brazilian Conference of Druidism and Celtic Reconstructionism in 2018, where tensions within the community were palpable. Erynn Rowan, a pivotal figure in the Celtic Reconstructionist movement, played a vital role in shaping subsequent discourse. This study examines the movement's heterogeneity, the conflicts arising from differing perspectives, and the interplay of identity and coloniality, along with the transformative impact of the conference on the Brazilian Celtic Pagan community.

2. Jenny Butler, “I Am One with the Twilight’s Dream”: Tracing Conceptual Lineages from the Celtic Revival to Modern Spiritual Movements’

Writers and artists such as Æ (George William) Russell, Ella Young, Maud Gonne, Augusta Gregory, and William Butler Yeats were core to the Celtic Revival or ‘Celtic Twilight’ movement in Ireland. Inspired as they were by Celtic mythology, the natural world, and Gaelic folklore, they drew on these influences in their artistic works and in their spiritual lives. During the artistic productions of this movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was a convergence of intellectual currents, drawing also from esoteric traditions such as Spiritualism, Theosophy and ceremonial magic. This synthesis of ideas and references resulted in a new type of spirituality that developed into what we now describe as Celtic spirituality. This paper traces the genealogy of intersecting traditions that informed the emergence of Celtic Christianity, contemporary Paganism and other spiritualities, and considers how they might in turn reconfigure to shape spiritual movements of the future.

3. Grace Conway, ‘Esotericism, Coloniality, and the Making of Pseudoarchaeological Discourse’

Pseudoarchaeology, also referred to as fringe or alternative archaeology, describes efforts to investigate the past that disregard or explicitly reject the established methods of professional historical and archaeological scholarship. Despite its lack of scientific credibility, works such as Erich von Däniken’s *Chariots of the Gods?* (1968) and Graham Hancock’s *Fingerprints of the Gods* (1995) have achieved substantial popular success and continue to shape public imagination as well as contemporary perceptions of ancient history. This paper traces the historical development of this discourse, arguing that it emerged primarily from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century esotericism, as well as from models of human diffusion produced within the intellectual and political contexts of European and American colonialism. In doing so, it seeks to critically investigate the politico-historical and religious genealogies of a major strand of contemporary cultural discourse.

Panel 3: Jehovah’s Witnesses: Social and Cultural Developments

PG09 // Chair: G. Chryssides

1. Richard Putman, ‘Watchtower Apocalypticism and Anticolonialism in Southern Africa’

In the early twentieth century, in the years leading up to 1914, the Bible Students believed that the times of the Gentiles would end that year and immediately be followed by Armageddon and the beginning of the millennium. A man by the name of William Booth, who had missionary experience in Africa, offered to share the Watchtower message in southern Africa. However, Booth also had an agenda of social change and while he did arrange for the distribution of Watchtower literature, the message that the Gentile times would end in 1914 morphed into an end of white rule. A number of indigenous Watchtower movements arose which were more concerned with the end of colonialism and continued to be a source of anticolonialism long after the First World War had ended.

2. Donald Jacobs, 'Jehovah's Witnesses, Secularisation, and Growth'

Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) are sometimes cited by critics of the secularization thesis, alongside other minority religious groups, as a counterexample to the widely observed decline in religious commitment and participation in modernised societies. This paper examines JW growth patterns in comparison with other Christian denominations and explores explanations proposed for their relative resilience. Growth has been central to JW self-understanding and is often interpreted internally as confirmation of their truth claims. Conversely, the decline of mainstream churches has long been acknowledged by JWs and explained with reference to biblical prophecy. Recent indications of a modest resurgence of religiosity in some Western contexts have coincided with a slight adjustment in JW interpretations of secularization. The JW case complicates rather than overturns secularization theory, illustrating how group-specific dynamics interact with broader societal shifts in religious belief and practice.

3. Lindy Lovett, 'Hidden Hierarchies: Gender, Spiritual Status, and Belonging among Jehovah's Witness Women'

Scholarship on Jehovah's Witnesses has often focused on doctrine, authority, and organisational control, yet the informal social dynamics shaping women's experiences remain underexplored. This paper presents emerging findings from qualitative research with women who identify as Jehovah's Witnesses, PIMO, and former Jehovah's Witnesses. Early interviews reveal a complex and largely unspoken social hierarchy among women within congregational life, structured around perceptions of spiritual performance and proximity to recognised forms of religious legitimacy. These dynamics create subtle systems of visibility, legitimacy, and exclusion that shape women's everyday religious lives. By foregrounding women's narratives, this paper argues that congregational life is not only governed by formal doctrine but also by gendered social structures that regulate belonging and recognition. Examining these dynamics provides new insight into how women navigate, negotiate, and sometimes disengage from the community.

Panel 4: Ecology and Beyond

PG11 // Chair: M. Stringer

1. Ethna Regan, 'The Genocide-Ecocide Nexus: Perspectives from Religious and Theological Ethics'

The human impact of war is so devastating that the environmental impacts are often overlooked as part of the violations of war, thus our responsibilities to both people and nature are not seen as essentially related. The concept of a genocide-ecocide nexus was first articulated by Damian Short and Martin Crook in 2014. The interconnection between the violations of human rights in war and the environmental degradation caused by war is at the heart of this concept, as is the realisation that ecocide creates conditions in which further conflict and genocidal war are possible. This nexus has become the focus of a growing body of scholarly literature. This paper will explore some of the

implicit and explicit engagement with the genocide-ecocide nexus in select religious and theological ethics.

2. Maria Nita, 'Plant Rich Diets and Green Christian Lived Ethics for Sustainable Food Futures

My paper will examine the emerging, lived, religious ethics of sustainable food. Food is strongly connected to religion, culture and community, as well as some of the biggest environmental challenges we face today. Many researchers agree that one of the most effective ways to reduce environmental pressure is by increasing our consumption of plants and reducing our reliance on meat and dairy (Mayefeld, 2023). Whilst some Christians accept a religious responsibility to reduce or stop consuming meat (Barclays, 2010), Christian attitudes relating to meat and dairy eating vary widely, reflecting broader societal controversies on these issues. To explore this, my paper will survey the environmental Christian scene, looking at how Forest Church, Eco Church and Vegan Church address these issues in their own materials. More specifically, drawing on my ethnographic and historical research, my paper will discuss a case study of the Green Christian charity in the UK.

3. Bettina Schmidt, 'Axé and the Interrelatedness Between Spirituality, Nature and Survival'

Natural disasters are often perceived as divine punishment. A recent example is the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 which was blamed on Vodou. Closer to my home is the Aberfan catastrophe 60 years ago which some preachers blamed on the decline of faith, however, with the unintended consequence of accelerating the decline in Wales instead of strengthening it. While academic studies voice a growing critique of the anthropocentric understanding of nature, their focus is still too often on Abrahamic religions. This paper expands the debate by reflecting on African-derived religions and the concept of axé, the divine energy that links human with other than human agencies. Land is not owned but inhabited in a relational and collective way. Changing the perspective towards 'spiritually relational territories' will challenge the understanding of natural disasters and the impact of climate change. Perceiving the effect of environmental destruction not only on material resources but also on the spiritual force will challenge the anthropocentric narrative.

Breakout Session 2 (Wed 19 Aug, 15.30-17.00)

Panel 5: Roundtable: Teaching and AI

PG01 // Chair: J. Powell

This roundtable discussion will explore the implications of generative AI (GenAI) for teaching, learning, and assessment within the study of religion in higher education. Panel members will consider ethical considerations and share their experiences of how GenAI is changing the way they work with students and design assignments.

Panellists:

1. Stefanie Sinclair
2. Joseph Webster
3. Aled Thomas
4. Hazel O'Brien

Panel 6: Religious Studies: Theoretical Reflections

PG02 // Chair: J. Kapáló

1. Paul-François Tremlett, 'Religious Studies after Neoliberalism'

Sherry Ortner's (2016) work on dark theory and the relation of dark theory to neoliberalism offers a useful point of departure for thinking about religious studies (McCutcheon 1997; King 1999; Fitzgerald 2000; Carrette and King 2005) and for thinking about futures beyond neoliberal imaginaries. In common with the historian Ewa Domańska "I am preoccupied with a rather naive question: what kind of approach ... should I promote in order to build a better world?" (Domańska 2021: 142). She settles for what she calls a "future-oriented prefigurative humanities" (2021: 143 *italics in original*), that combines a critique of "anthropocentrism as well as Eurocentrism and secularism, which, until now, have been the dominant modes of constructing knowledge about the world and humanity" (2021: 153). Perhaps, given the implication of the humanities in "patriarchal, colonial, capitalist, and anthropocentric regimes of mastery and exploitation" (von Stuckrad 2023: 617), this could be tweaked to become a future-oriented prefigurative posthumanities, which might recognise the entangled futures of humans and non-humans. But what does this mean for religious studies, the wider landscape of the humanities (and social sciences), and indeed the university? In this paper, I will explore these questions.

2. Edward Graham-Hyde, "In, Out, Out, In": An insider's outside observations of an outsider utilising insider experience as part of the *New Religiosity and the Digital Study of Eudaimonia* JTF-funded project'

The New Religiosity and the Digital Study of Eudaimonia project aims to create the "world's largest, most collaborative, open-access mixed data set on contemporary religion". Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, it is hosted by the Open University and delivered with the Database of Religious History and Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (Inform), under the leadership of Dr Suzanne Newcombe and Dr Stephen Christopher. As a proof of concept, the project seeks 400 entries on contemporary groups across five categories: Christian, Dharmic,

Islamic, Pagan/Esoteric, and East or Southeast Asian traditions. This presentation explores the project's wider academic implications while reflecting on the experience of being a group member and an academic in new religiosity, as well as a trustee of Inform.

3. Alexandra Grieser, 'What Will a Global History of Religion Look Like? – Elements of a Project'

In current debates around the “crisis of the humanities” and possible “new world orders”, religion does not seem to be on top of the agenda. Comparing the situation with the “culture crisis” around 1900, however, it is worth asking what role religion and its independent academic study play in diagnosing the changes once called modernisation. Itself deeply grounded in the colonial past of European knowledge cultures, the Study of Religion has also become a medium of critique. This paper suggests that writing a Global History of Religion is an ongoing project: it requires collaboration and structures that link the global and the local; creates historical awareness for where we are coming from; and is concerned with who this “we” is and should be. It is suggested that “global” means more than covering underrepresented geographies, scholars, and themes. Discussed is an open project that works on a framework, shaping how we study and what we teach.

Panel 7: Millenarianism, Past and Present

PG09 // Chair: J. Meggitt

- 1 James Crossley, 'Robin Hood's Utopia'

In this paper, I look at the relationship between the 1381 English uprising (the Peasants' Revolt) and the early Robin Hood stories of the fifteenth century. While a direct connection cannot be fully made, there are related thematic and popular concerns and uses of the Bible and Christianity. By linking these shared interests with the shifts in class relations and social mobility in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, I investigate how ideas associated with the violent millenarian transformation of England envisaged by leading rebels of 1381 was partially domesticated in the Robin Hood stories for a socially ascendent class, particularly through the setting of the Edenic greenwood. Through a critical use of the categories of 'millenarianism' and 'utopianism,' we can see how the greenwood further resolves tensions in the stories (and in uses of the stories) between outlaw life and royal approval and between criminality and justice.

2. Elizabeth Eastwood Dewing, “For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest” (Isaiah 61:1): Elizabeth Finn, Millenarian Visions of Jewish Restoration, and the Birth of Christian Zionism'

This paper considers how millenarian theology shaped British spatial imaginaries of Palestine in the century preceding the 1917 Balfour Declaration. British support for a Jewish national home was rooted in eschatological traditions that cast Palestine as a divinely charged landscape. Examining the writings of Elizabeth Finn (1843–1863), wife of the second British consul in Jerusalem, the paper explores how her interactions with the land, people and sacred history of Palestine contributed to a growing millenarian vision of Jewish restoration. Finn's practical efforts to 'prepare' the land informed British perceptions of Palestine as a space awaiting fulfilment and provides a new angle

on wider nineteenth-century Protestant engagements with Palestine. The environmental religious imaginaries that Finn represents laid some of the early groundwork to the British support of the creation of a modern state of Israel, and her legacy clearly endures in perceptions of the 'Holy Land' and contemporary Christian Zionism.

3. Jackie Hosein, 'The 2012 Glastonbury Connection'

Following the Harmonic Convergence in 1987, and the millennium, the next prophesied transformational event was the 2012 Mayan calendar phenomenon. There was some mainstream interest, including an apocalyptic Hollywood film, but there has been little research on how New Age and alternative communities responded to the event. However, ephemera, with which I will illustrate my presentation, provide evidence of related activity in Glastonbury, from local events to conferences attracting international speakers. The town's heterogeneity enabled multiple activities under the 2012 'umbrella'. I will discuss how Glastonbury was significant in promoting the 2012 narrative: providing validation as an important New Age centre, and endorsed by key figures visiting the town. I will argue that the Glastonbury Symposium, and local author Geoff Stray, helped create a narrative of 2012 as a global spiritual awakening, drawing together crop circles, astrology, extraterrestrials, and evolution of consciousness, in Glastonbury's unique milieu.

Panel 8: Contemporary Traditions and Future-Making

PG11 // Chair: O. Scharbrodt

1. Anika Kabani, 'Drawing Nearer to "American Islam": Asylum, Secular Feminism, and the Governance of Religious Futures'

This paper examines how the U.S. asylum system operates as a site for the production of Islam's future, advancing a normative vision of "American Islam" as private, individualized, and aligned with secular feminist ideals. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with West African Muslim women seeking asylum in New York City from 2024-2026, I trace how religious life is rearticulated through the bureaucratic and affective demands of the asylum encounter. Building on critical secularism studies, I approach asylum not as a neutral adjudication of religious persecution, but as a mode of governance that actively reshapes the forms religion can take. In asylum interviews, legal affidavits, and legal testimony, applicants are called upon to narrate both past harm and future possibility. I show how Muslim women's claims are often rendered legible through scripts of gendered emancipation that align with secular liberal expectations: distancing from "culture," and "tradition," foregrounding individual belief, and narrating trajectories toward autonomy, empowerment and self-realization. In this context, feminism operates not simply as a language of resistance, but as a regulatory framework through which certain forms of Islam become recognizable as credible and deserving of protection. Practices and attachments that exceed or complicate this framework risk being recast as evidence of incredibility or incoherence. I argue that these encounters constitute a forward-looking project in which asylum adjudication disciplines the future of Islam in America. "Drawing nearer," then, names both a spatial and ethical reorientation: a movement toward a decontextualized, "culture-free" Islam imagined as compatible with U.S. secular modernity. By foregrounding how gendered and secular norms converge in the

governance of asylum, the paper contributes to anthropological debates on secularism, mobility, and the remaking of religious life.

2. Gazal Mathur, 'Faith, Futures, and Frontiers: Reimagining Sustainable Societies Through Religion'

This paper argues that contemporary crises including materialism, environmental damage, corruption, violence, and moral erosion, necessitate a revitalized role for religion in fostering growth and social well-being. It examines spiritually grounded communities as practical, proactive responses to these global challenges through cooperative living, service, education, conservation and peace. Using qualitative comparison, this study surveys global spiritual movements, interfaith initiatives, and sustainability efforts aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, alongside the spread of yoga, meditation, mindfulness, and the science of consciousness. A central case study is Dayalbagh in India. Rooted in the 15th-century Sant Mat tradition and the Radhasoami Faith, Dayalbagh serves as an exemplary model of a cooperative, sustainable, and value-based communal life, recognized at the 2023 G20 Summit. The findings suggest that such spiritually anchored communities offer scalable models for sustainable development, combining ethical discipline, harmony with nature, and egalitarian cooperation to cultivate a future enlightened society.

3. Nduka Udeagha, 'Prophetic Authority and the Making of the Future in Nigerian Crossover Nights'

In Nigerian Pentecostal churches, the New Year "Crossover Night" has become one of the most significant rituals for the production of the future. These services take place at December 31st, where charismatic leaders exercise prophetic authority to declare and shape the coming year. In 2026, for instance, Bishop David Oyedepo (Winners' Chapel) proclaimed it the "Year of Open Doors," Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (Christ Embassy) declared it the "Year of Manifestation," and Dr. Daniel Olukoya (Mountain of Fire and Miracles) announced "Year of Great Deliverance and Fresh Glory." This paper draws on sermon analysis and ethnographic observations, to explore how such declarations function as mechanisms for organising sacred time. I argue that prophetic authority collapses temporal, spatial, and existential frontiers, transforming uncertainty into assured divine outcome. It contributes to broader discussions on religion, temporality, and the production of futures in postcolonial societies.

17.00-18.15

Keynote 1: Marion Bowman, 'Re-placing Religion: Locating the Spiritual in the 21st Century'

PG01 // Chair: Paul-François Tremlett

Followed by drinks reception

The focus of this keynote lecture is the multifaceted location of religion, spirituality and non-religion in the 21st century. Place, placemaking and place marking are significant components in religion, frequently central to the ways in which people construct and locate their lifeworlds. Through the affordances of placelore, people perceive themselves transported physically and metaphysically to different realms, times, states and experiences. The dynamic intertwining of narrative, framing and praxis inscribes landscapes with multilayered religious, social, political and cultural meaning for a range of groups and individuals. How places are storied and re-storied, whether narratives are used to support or subvert prevailing authority structures, how people relate to, reimagine or reclaim places are significant facets of 21st century religiosity and storyworlds. From phenomena such as the heritagisation of religion and re-presentation of pilgrimage in northern Europe to the creation of fresh places and the contestation of old sites in former Soviet countries, currently religious spaces and practices are being 're-placed' and reframed, and meaningful new landscapes are being envisaged and constructed. Religion is undoubtedly located in myriad forms, media and spaces and its frontiers are distinctly fuzzy. Going forward, religious studies must continue to reflect the heterogeneity, contestation, creativity and complexities of people interacting with places and simultaneously building their own lifeworlds.

Breakout Session 3 (Thurs 20 Aug, 09.30-11.00)

Panel 9: The Religious Landscape of Ireland

PG01 // Chair: B. Anderson

1. Gladys Ganiel, 'Religion on the Island of Ireland: Futures and Frontiers'

This paper explores 'futures and frontiers' for religion on the island of Ireland, arguing that Ireland can no longer be described as an 'island of faith' within a secularising Europe. Drawing on my forthcoming book, *An Island of Faith?*, I argue that what is emerging is a religious frontier characterised by secularisation with intensification, which has a double meaning: an acceleration not only of secularisation itself, but of religious practice among a significant minority. Using multiple data sets from three research projects (2020-2025), I show that there has been no 'quiet revival' or 'turning tide' against secularisation on the island. Rather, the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to an intensification of practice among a minority of Christians – which complicates rather than reverses secularisation. I explore the implications of 'secularisation with intensification', reflecting on what ongoing religious change means for individuals, communities, and society, especially faith's potential contributions to public life.

2. Sarah Carol, Micheál Collins and Egle Gusciute, 'Religious Belonging in Ireland: Results from the European Social Survey 2002–2026'

Have residents in Ireland become more religious over time? Recent reporting based on the European Social Survey indicates an 8-percentage-point increase in religious belonging in Ireland in 2023, raising questions about a potential reversal of secularization trends. This paper examines long-term patterns in religious belonging, analyzing variation across birth cohorts, gender, education, denomination, and survey mode (web, paper and face-to-face) using multivariate models. Preliminary results confirm that the share of respondents identifying with a religion was significantly higher in 2023 than in 2018 and 2021/22. However, levels were not significantly higher than in earlier years, suggesting that the increase represents fluctuation rather than a sustained resurgence. Tentative findings from the most recent data indicate a return towards pandemic and pre-pandemic levels; however this varies across groups. Nonetheless, religious belonging in Ireland remains comparatively high within a European context characterized by ongoing secularization or at least departure from mainstream religions.

3. Hazel O'Brien, 'The discursive place of Ireland in LDS General Conference: Visibility, memory, and belonging'

While the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has maintained a relationship with Ireland since the nineteenth century, Ireland appears only intermittently in its official discourse. Through keyword searches using the LDS General Conference (GC) corpus for terms including "Ireland," "Irish," "Dublin," "Belfast," and "British Isles," this paper traces the distribution and context of Irish references across time. The paper combines frequency analysis with close contextual analysis to ask whether Ireland appears as a mission field, a source of emigrant converts, a historical example, or a contemporary Latter-day Saint community. I argue that Ireland's place in GC discourse is marked by intermittent visibility; Ireland is more often remembered through historical, missionary, or diasporic frames than represented as a living site of contemporary Mormon belonging. In doing so, this paper contributes to scholarship on global Mormonism, minority religions in Ireland, and the uneven visibility of small countries in transnational religious discourse.

Panel 10: Boundaries Within and Beyond Traditions

PG02 // Chair: S. Owen

1. Yitzchak Kerem, 'Boundaries of Sephardic/Mizrahi Jewish Theology, Law and Tradition'

Sephardic and Mizrahi Eastern Jewry differs from Ashkenazi Judaism in Jewish law, liturgy, prayer, thought, tradition and language. Defining the parameters of Sephardic/Mizrahi reveal the extent of this religious ethnicity. The greatest commonality of this diverse grouping is the common background under Islam. Most profound is Jewish thought under Islam in the Iberian Peninsula, influences of Hellenistic rationalism and poetic Hebrew culture focusing on the Holy Land. Biblical interpretation for religious learning differing from Ashkenazi Talmudic debate focused on etymology and meaning culminating in a century of yeshiva study called Iyun in Zamora. In the Muslim Persia, Sufi thought and Zoroastrian philosophy integrated in Jewish law and poetics. Sephardi Judaism utilized Hebraicized languages like Ladino and Judeo-Arabic in poetry, religious practices in amulets, birth, dowry, marriage and divorce traditions, and practices central

to the Jewish calendar for holidays, the new moon and biblical translation in Sabbath prayer. In new Jewish languages religious poetry was created in the form of selihot, bakashot, holiday coplas, and burial endechas.

2. Colette Colfer, 'Beyond Boundaries: Byzantine-style Iconography in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries'

Although Byzantine-style iconography is associated with Orthodox Christianity, in the last roughly one hundred years it has been increasingly practiced by people in diverse places and in other denominations. Icons have even gone beyond global frontiers and have been displayed in space on the International Space Station. The icon's content, as well as its environs, has moved beyond traditional boundaries in line with societal and technological changes. Byzantine-style icons on wooden boards have been utilised to highlight contemporary social justice issues including gay rights, abortion, and immigration. In addition, although icon-painting was traditionally viewed as a male practice, women are now amongst the most prominent iconographers in the world. At the same time as these transformations, recognisable features of the Byzantine icon have been maintained thus resulting in a tension between continuity and change whilst pointing to a further fracturing of styles into the future.

3. Moojan Momen, 'Baha'i: The Consequences of Breaking Through Cultural Boundaries'

The Baha'i Faith began in the 1860s and has expanded so that there are now organised Baha'i communities in almost every country in the world. In the process it has crossed boundaries not just geographical but also cultural. This paper will look at two such crossing of cultural boundaries. The first was a breakthrough from the Islamic world to the West, which occurred when the head of the religion travelled to Europe and North America. The second was a breakthrough from the Global North to the Global South, resulting in large numbers of rural new believers. Each of these breakthroughs has transformed the way that Baha'is see their religion and present it. The first moved the self-image of the religion from that of being a religion of the fulfilment of prophecy to a religion of modern social principles. The second moved the religion on to one of social action and development.

Panel 11: Traditions on the Move

PG09 // Chair: M. Stringer

1. Vishal Sangu, 'How Sikhs are Using Music to Express, Negotiate, and Decolonise their identities'

This paper examines how Sikhs utilise music to express, negotiate, and decolonise their identities. Drawing on decolonial theory, I argue that Sikh musical practices function as a challenge to colonial epistemologies that have historically marginalised Sikh history, spirituality, and political subjectivity. Through platforms such as YouTube, streaming services, and social media, Sikhs use Gurbani Sangeet, Panjabi folk music, and blending British and Panjabi soundscapes to decolonise their identities. These digital soundscapes disrupt Eurocentric representations of religion as static and private, instead foregrounding Sikhi as embodied in public and private settings. The paper highlights how digital music enables Sikh youth, in particular, to resist colonial frameworks of assimilation by articulating hybrid identities rooted in faith, memory, and resistance. By centring

sound as a decolonial medium, this study contributes to debates on digital religion and diaspora studies, demonstrating how Sikh musical expression online operates as an emerging decolonial force.

2. Andrew Topping, 'Social Technologies and the Parable of the Unjust Steward'

As social media and communications devices gain greater prominence in our contemporary society, this paper conceptually contrasts these technologies with the 'social technologies' of the first century, using the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13) as a case-study. Drawing on Conor McCabe's usage of the term 'social technology' in his work *Money* (2018), I present the exchange of commodities and the account book (τον λογον) in the parable as 'media that are social', media that communicate in lieu of people. I posit that the parable may serve as an endorsement to re-socialise human relations by subverting the technology that has come to replace them.

3. Zoe Zielke, "'Becoming Otherwise": Buddhism, Meditation, and the Crafting of Alternative Futures'

This paper engages with the concept of the future by exploring the use of Buddhist meditation as a form of "prefigurative politics." Prefiguration refers to the ways in which an activist embodies and enacts, within their activism, the socialities and practices they foster for broader society. Drawing on two years of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in the UK, I take the case of Extinction Rebellion Buddhists, a Buddhist eco-activist group, and their practice of public, collective meditation. The case of XRB shows how utopian visions of a more caring ecological future, grounded in Buddhist values of compassion and interdependence, are enacted through processes of being as opposed to doing. The meditating body is explored as a means of reclaiming and re-enchanting the world through the cultivation of new caring imaginaries and the generation of collective, shared intentions. The paper advocates for the significance of affective, embodied, and spiritual experiences in the crafting of alternative futures.

Panel 12: Jehovah's Witnesses: Futures and Frontiers

PG11 // Chair: J. Webster

1. George D. Chryssides, 'Blurred Boundaries: Stakeholders in the Study of Jehovah's Witnesses'

In our 2019 anthology *The Insider/Outsider Debate*, Stephen Gregg and I argued that "insiders" and "outsiders" was a false binary, and we identified a number of positions – insider, outsider, and peripheral – adopted by those involved in religious organisations. In this presentation I extend this typology to include the positions of researchers, and to apply to the study of Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs). Among categories not typically recognised by scholars are the PIMOs (Physically In Mentally Out) and POMIs (Physically Out Mentally In). The former members who feign allegiance for ulterior motives, while the latter have left the organisation, but remain obsessed with following its activities and giving them publicity. The presentation considers frontiers of allegiance and their role in furthering the boundaries of Watch Tower research.

2. Mathew N. Schmalz, 'Identifying Gog of Magog: Futures and Frontiers in Watchtower Prophetic Speculation'

Jehovah's Witnesses are best known for their focus on Biblical prophecy, particularly concerning the Battle of Armageddon that will precede the renewal of the Earth as a millennial paradise. In recent Watchtower publications, speculation has concentrated on the identity of Gog of Magog, a figure from the Hebrew Bible, specifically Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. Jehovah's Witnesses once identified Gog of Magog as a "spirit creature" but now argue that Gog of Magog represents a union of worldly powers acting in concert with "The King of the North" to attack the "land" or "community" of pure spiritual worshippers represented by Jehovah's Witnesses. The function of prophecy in this case relates not just to a particular understanding of the future but reflects the reality of a community persecuted on its "frontiers," particularly in Russia, where "The King of the North" might now be rising as Biblically predicted.

3. Jason J. E. Wright, 'Consistent Eschatology: Fixed Futures among the Jehovah's Witnesses'

While Governments and citizens navigate an uncertain future millenarian and apocalyptic traditions remain remarkably stable, absorbing and processing political, economic and environmental change through a fixed eschatological lens. This paper examines the stability and consistency of eschatological hopes among Jehovah's Witnesses and how changing frontiers are employed to reinforce insider optimism for the future. Evidence for comparison is drawn from the Watchtower study article of April 2026.

Breakout Session 4 (Thurs 20 Aug, 11.30-13.00)

Panel 13: Film, Media, and Religion

PG01 // Chair: A. Grieser

1. Paul Clogher, 'The Porous Body of Christ: Displacement and Subversion in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La Ricotta*'

In the 1963 short film *La Ricotta*, Pier Paolo Pasolini retells the passion of Jesus through the story of Stracci, a destitute extra in a lavish biblical film. While his fellow cast members labour through a statuesque and sentimental production, Stracci searches for food to feed both himself and his family. In a satirical twist, he dies of asphyxiation on the cross while playing the good thief after gorging on the eponymous block of cheese. When the intra-filmic director, played by Orson Welles, notices, he intones: 'Poor Stracci, he had to die in order to show that he was alive.' The film is prefaced by a quotation from the Gospel of Mark: 'For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' (Mark 4:22-23). Taking this dimension of hiddenness as its cue, this paper explores *La Ricotta* as both an archetype of religious resurgence in modernity and an example of the Christian metanarrative's porous boundaries.

2. Karen Wenell, 'The Second Coming of the Grinch: Neoliberal Futures of Millennial Capitalism at the Frontiers of Mediatized Religion'

This paper argues that *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1957) and its multiple media adaptations, is a story that echoes the recurring triumph of millennial capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff), where neoliberal visions of the future absorb critique and display impatience with delayed rewards. The Grinch, as bringer of a temporary apocalypse through the removal of material goods, seems to forge an anti-capitalist figure, yet his scrooge-like transformation, triggered by the communal song of the Whos, initiates his second coming and the immediate return of material wealth. This story sits at the new frontiers of post-industrial consumer-oriented media environments where banal forms of mediatized religion (Hjarvard) enchant neoliberal visions of the future. This paper offers a critique of free market spirituality and its failure to recognise the limits of planetary resources or the ecological damage of wasteful accumulation by prioritising symbolic over structural challenge, suggesting that maybe apocalypse ought to mean a little bit more.

3. Stefanie Sinclair, 'Filmmaking as a Creative, Participatory Practice within Academic Research'

This paper examines participatory filmmaking as a creative practice in the study of religion. Participatory video methods have existed since the 1960s, but have become increasingly affordable and accessible due to developments in digital technology. Drawing on insights from the international RETOPEA (Religious Toleration and Peace) project, this paper argues that participatory filmmaking can provide valuable insights into participant's perspectives, attitudes, and experiences by enabling participants to construct and share their own narratives. Moreover, as a collaborative process, filmmaking as such has great potential to foster active engagement, critical reflection, and dialogue around sensitive topics. However, research involving filmmaking also raises many ethical considerations that must be carefully managed.

Panel 14: Populism, Free Speech, and Digital Culture

PG02 // Chair: A Thomas

1. Jonathan Abernethy-Barkley, 'Futures of Awakening: Populism, Conspiritoriality, and Conversion Narratives at the Frontiers of Digital Insurgency'

This paper explores the futures and frontiers of populism and conspiritoriality as lived narratives of meaning, belonging, and transformation. Drawing on a socio-ethnographic approach, it examines how individuals aligned with conspiritorial movements describe experiences of "awakening" through conversion-like testimonies that mirror religious narratives of revelation and mission. These stories function as both spiritual practice and political activism, shaping identity, community, and moral purpose. The paper argues that conspiritoriality provides participants with alternative future imaginaries in response to social uncertainty, distrust of institutions, and digital fragmentation. Narratives of awakening create symbolic frontiers between the "awakened" and the "deceived," reframing political conflict through spiritual and apocalyptic language. By examining the convergence of digital religion, populism, and alternative epistemologies, the paper asks how these movements reshape understandings of truth, authority, and belonging in contemporary society, and how spiritual mythologies increasingly inform political imaginaries and insurgent forms of activism.

2. Nicole Graham, “‘Making a Tit of Yourself’: A Clash of Religious Offence, Free Speech, and Satire’

This paper examines the Advertising Standards Authority’s (ASA) recent ban of comedian Fern Brady’s stand-up tour poster *I Gave You Milk to Drink*. According to Brady the image was a “satirical recreation” of Alonso Cano’s 17th century painting *The Lactation of St Bernard*, yet following receipt of one complaint, the ASA found that the ad was “likely to cause serious offence” and so “the ad must not appear again in the form complained of” (ASA 2024). This paper notes that this case did not receive the same attention as other “humour scandals” (see Kuipers 2011), which presents an interesting point of inquiry: what can make humour scandalous? Beyond this, the paper explores the conflict that can arise between religion and comedy, and free speech and (religious) offence in contemporary society. Ultimately, this paper will ask: who gets to make a joke with religious sentiments and who gets to censor them?

3. Bethan Oake, ‘Demonic bodies: sex, sexuality, and gender in Satanic moral panic discourse’

This paper discusses the various intersections of social discourses regarding sex, sexuality and gender within both the 1980s Satanic Panic, and its contemporary revival today. It examines the diverse and often conflicting roles that these narratives cast women and mothers in. They both appeal to notions of maternal child protection, and even directly adopting some aspects of feminist rhetoric, yet also frame women as perpetrators and enablers, alongside upholding strict binary roles that dictate ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ideals of womanhood. This paper maintains that the persistence of Satanic Panic conspiracy claims today relies primarily on its ability to perpetuate these same established notions of ‘deviant’ sexualities and gender expression, which become weaponised as a means to demonise both cis-and-trans women and girls but also homosexuality. This paper argues that these various discourses should not be understood as separate but collectively reflect the ways in which puritanical narratives of ‘ultimate moral evil’ have always been targeted against marginalised members of society. Not only this, but that their more recent absorption within the increasing breadth of ‘manosphere’ content online reflects concerning implications for their ongoing impact.

Panel 15: History, Religion, and Geography

PG09 //Chair: J. Butler

1. Erin Louise Clark, ‘In Zion “we all are rich – there is no real poverty”: Reclaiming Narratives of Early Working-class LDS Converts in England’

It is widely known that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints holds proselytising through missionary activity as paramount in their evangelical operation. Although the first instance of LDS missionary activity in England is widely regarded as “one of the greatest missionary journeys of all time, [...] into one of the greatest nations of all history,” (see Evans 1984) it can be argued that the narratives of early LDS converts in the British Isles have largely been reduced to mere footnotes in the history of the movement. Arriving in 1837, the pioneering LDS missionary party divinely bestowed with the task of spreading the Mormon message into the British Isles was greeted by a fractious England typified by rapid industrialisation, a burgeoning population, and widespread

poverty – all of which made way for an expansive ‘crisis of faith’ for the Victorian population. Despite this environment being a perceived antithesis to a spiritual environment, the LDS Church managed to capitalise upon this context by specifically targeting “the urban poor.” (see Watt 2009) The English working classes, perceived to be in possession of “strong faith [yet] lacking in speculative intelligence” (see Young et.al 1840) seem to have been targeted due to their ease of belief and lack of resistance in conversion. Whether indicative of underlying classism, or representing a forethinking yet unsympathetic response to navigating an uncertain religious context, the omission of the narratives of these early working-class LDS converts in England from the continued LDS canon presents some interesting moral quandaries. This paper seeks to detail the religious and social experiences of early English LDS converts against the backdrop of the Victorian crisis of faith in order to explain the earliest capitalised successes of missionary activity in the LDS Church. The overall aim of this paper is to consider aspects of canonisation in religious literature, to question which communities are afforded the luxury of narrative preservation through formal community records, and to afford some academic attention to these communities which played an imperative role in the establishment of this global new religious movement.

2. Suzanne Owen, ‘Ossian, Merlin and the Mythical Land in Scottish Druidry’

Modern Druidry has developed from antiquarian interests in ancient monuments, through ceremonial magical traditions to eco-spirituality. In Scotland, these have also been blended with threads of mythology and lore popularised during the Celtic Revival, alongside conceptions of Celtic Christianity and features in the landscape itself. One notable source feeding into the mythologising of the land was James Macpherson’s *The Poems of Ossian* (1773), the setting of which Henry Okun (1967) described as “more real than the people who inhabit it. Drowned in eternal mist,” while Barry Cunliffe (2018) called the collection “romantic nonsense [that] still persists.” Another example is so-called Scottish Merlin whose narrative is woven into the landscape of Tweeddale. Rather than merely conveying a nostalgia for what was lost, these stories provide frameworks and reference points for contemporary emplacement activities crafted into a distinctive though loosely imagined Scottish Druid tradition beyond ethno-nationalist or religious boundary-making.

3. Milan Reith, ‘Freemasonry and the Politics of Exposure in 1980s Britain’

In the 1980s, two publications significantly altered public perceptions of freemasonry in Britain: *The Brotherhood* (1983), a major bestseller by Stephen Knight, and *Inside the Brotherhood* (1989) by Martin Short. Written as journalistic exposés for a broad readership, both works alleged that British freemasonry exercised a strong and largely negative influence on sectors such as law, banking, business, and, most importantly, the police force. These claims not only shaped anti-masonic discourse in the years that followed but also contributed to growing public concern about transparency and accountability, ultimately helping to prompt the establishment of an official parliamentary committee in July 1992 to investigate the role of freemasonry in public life. This paper adopts a critical-historical approach to these texts, situating them within the authors’ broader oeuvres and the practices of investigative journalism at the time, in order to shed light on this influential episode in British religious history.

Panel 16: Apocalypse, Past and Present

PG11 // Chair: J. Crossley

1. Courtney MacPhee, 'Apocalyptic Pluralism: Religious Liberty and the Propagation of the Gospel in the English Revolution'

The question of toleration during England's republican years festered in conversations about restructuring state and religious institutions. For many, these were not merely political questions but eschatological ones: the upheaval of the Revolution convinced many that they were living in the final days, that the collapse of episcopacy and execution of a king signaled an imminent millennium, and that England had been appointed as the vanguard of a global reformation. Central to these debates was a millenarian logic that simultaneously drove demands for broader religious toleration and aggressive gospel propagation, revealing how competing apocalyptic visions shaped notions of religious liberty and England's evangelical duty. This paper argues that puritans' avid discussions of the reformation of the English religious settlement during the 1640s and 1650s demonstrates how different visions of religious purification, animated by millenarian expectations, impacted plans for religious toleration and the propagation of the gospel.

2. Thomas Bromwell, 'At the Edge of Time: Apocalypse as a Cultural Frontier in Early Twentieth-Century British Art'

This paper reconceptualises apocalypse in early twentieth-century British art as a cultural frontier, identifying a liminal zone in which temporal rupture and futurity are actively negotiated. Rather than treating apocalypse as a terminal event, it approaches apocalyptic imagery as a threshold structure that mediates between collapse and transformation. Situating visual responses to World War I within this framework, the paper argues that motifs of destruction, judgment, and resurrection function as frontier-making devices, enabling the rearticulation of time, subjectivity, and belief under conditions of crisis. Through readings of works by Stanley Spencer, Paul Nash, and David Jones, it demonstrates how apocalyptic forms sustain religious imaginaries while simultaneously reconfiguring them within an emergent secular modernity. The paper thus positions apocalypse as a generative site for theorising the relationship between crisis, temporality, and the production of possible futures.

3. Scott Culpepper, 'Hidden Demons, Harbingers of Coming Catastrophes: Satanic Panic as Vernacular Apocalypse in Britain, Ireland, and the Atlantic World'

Episodes of satanic panic are often treated as late twentieth century outliers rooted in media sensationalism and particular social anxieties. This paper reframes these episodes of satanic panic as examples of vernacular apocalypticism, situating them within a longer Anglophone history of anticipating hidden evil and imminent moral collapse. Drawing on British and Irish materials alongside transatlantic case studies, the paper traces structural continuities between early modern witchcraft narratives, nineteenth-century evangelical and moral reform movements, and late twentieth-century panics over ritual abuse. In each case, fears of concealed networks, corrupted bodies, and endangered children articulate a future-oriented crisis in which the social order appears on the brink of revelation, restoration or ruin. By placing satanic panic within the study of apocalyptic and millenarian movements, this paper challenges sharp distinctions between "religious" and "secular" fear, highlighting how these narrative forms continue to shape the boundaries of belief in modern Britain and Ireland.

14.00-15.15

Keynote 2: Oliver Scharbrodt, 'Whose Neutrality? Postcoloniality and the Political Frontiers of Religious Studies'

PG01 // Chair: Jenny Butler

Amid the rise of right-wing populism, resurgent authoritarianism, the dehumanisation of migrants and refugees and the normalisation of genocide, what futures can Religious Studies imagine for itself? The field has grounded its academic legitimacy in methodological agnosticism, non-confessionality and the suspension of normative judgement. Post-colonial critique suggests that these principles do not stand outside politics. They emerged within histories of empire, secular governance and unequal regimes of knowledge which have determined what counts as "religion" and which forms of epistemic authority are recognised as legitimate and academic. This keynote argues that neutrality can operate as a form of political disavowal, allowing Religious Studies to analyse exclusion, racialisation and violence without confronting the structures that sustain them. The question, therefore, is not whether Religious Studies should become political: it already is. It needs to acknowledge and contest the politics it reproduces and to unsettle the colonial and secular boundaries which organise the field. Moving beyond neutrality means pushing the frontiers of Religious Studies towards an academic praxis which confronts colonial continuities, resists dehumanisation and refuses scholarly detachment in the face of genocide.

Breakout Session 5 (Friday 21 Aug, 09.30-11.00)

Panel 17: Book Panel: *Secularism, Race, and the Politics of Islamophobia in Europe and Beyond*

PG01 // Chair: Sharmin Sadequee

Within the field of Islamophobia, dominant scholarship and social movement in Europe and North America identifies Islamophobia as a form of racism, where race and religion have become conflated in the racialization process of Islamophobia. However, the book *Secularism, Race, and the Politics of Islamophobia* (University of Alberta, 2025) offers a novel contribution to the field, arguing that current scholarship on Islamophobia does not account for the relationship between secularism and race in social systems. The book explores the relationship between religion and secular posture to Islamophobia in theorizing it as structural racism. The panellists will examine the secular posture to Islamophobia by highlighting how secularism facilitates anti-Muslim racism as well as the many efforts of grassroots in countering Islamophobia. Advocating for a decolonial approach to better theorize the phenomenon, the authors call attention to and explore how secularism constructs Islam and Muslims in the discourses and practices of Islamophobia, whether such racism arises from right-wing or liberal, left-wing populist political frameworks and embedded in and drives the disciplinary institutions of the State, such as law, political groups, government entities, and bureaucracies, to authorize racism and the racialization of Muslims and Islam in the Global North and Global South. The panel will engage with themes of secularization

or the resurgence of religion; religion and populism; religion and mobilities; postcolonial religion; boundaries of ‘religion’.

Panellists:

- 1 Sharmin Sadequee
2. Dustin Byrd
3. Alain Gabon
4. Nakita Valerio

Panel 18: In the Classroom: Pedagogical Reflections

PG02 // Chair: S. Sinclair

1. Gary Keogh, ‘Sex Education in Faith Schools: Notes from the Frontlines of (Post)Secularism’

This paper explores the complex relationship between religious sexual ethics and sex education in UK faith schools. Faith schools represent a distinctive site of encounter between religious traditions and secular, multicultural societies, often characterised by ambiguity and tension, particularly in relation to debates on LGBT inclusivity. Drawing on a critical review of existing literature alongside practitioner research informed by 15 years of experience working in faith schools, the paper examines how schools and teachers navigate competing religious and secular values, statutory curricular requirements, and pastoral duties of care. This paper argues, in line with post-secular theory, that dichotomous framings of religious and secular approaches to sex education fail to capture the lived realities of faith schools. However, greater nuance does not resolve these tensions; rather, it foregrounds persistent ambiguities around school ethos, inclusion, and social cohesion.

2. Romana Meereis, ‘Buddhism in English Religious Education: Its Future and the Implications of the Curriculum and Assessment Review’

Buddhism is the second most taught religion at Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) in England, yet students and teachers can struggle with its concepts, practices, and pluralism. A 2024 Ofsted report also suggested that Buddhism/Dharmic traditions are often overlooked in the classroom (Ofsted, 2024). Then, in 2025, the Curriculum and Assessment Review suggested that Religious Education should be made part of the National Curriculum in England, offering the possibility of great change. This paper will investigate how Buddhism is currently represented in curriculum texts, teachers’ practice, viewed by stakeholders and Buddhist studies academics, alongside a discussion of the future of Buddhism/Dharmic traditions within English Religious Education. This will be explored through document analysis, exploring Locally Agreed Syllabuses (LAS), textbooks, exam specifications as well as interviews and classroom observation to explore the beliefs and experiences of teachers, academics, and stakeholders.

3. Peter Admirand, ‘Teaching Religions and Pop Culture: Integrating Jesus and the Buddha—along with The Joker and Darth Vader—in the Classroom’

In this presentation, I will reflect on teaching religions with pop culture—through monographs, edited books, academic papers, chapters, and conference presentations—and how this approach sharpens the breadth and depth of religious ideas, themes, and narratives, especially through

mediums like comics, film, television, and video games. I will argue that teaching religion and theology alongside fields like comics studies and game studies broadens and challenges both the study of religions and the pop culture subfield while enriching student engagement and participation.

4. Krittika Bhattacharjee, 'Playing with Religion: Reimagining Religious Studies in the Writing Classroom'

Teaching religion in contemporary Indian universities requires imagination in the face of risk. How can curricula resist both the asymmetries of the World Religions Paradigm (Cotter and Davidson, 2011) and the re-trenching of majoritarian politics (Mehta, 2025)? What teaching methods can weather the “chilly climate” of self-censorship (Tierney and Sabharwall, 2010) and the decline in academic freedom (Hassan, 2025)? Using student essays and reports over four semesters, this paper positions the writing classroom as a critical site for the future of Religious Studies. It demonstrates how establishing reflexivity as a disciplinary imperative and using dramatic writing to animate scholarly debates (such as the insider/outsider problem) facilitates the acts of “moving across” central to interpretive work (Tweed, 2022). By foregrounding arts-based pedagogies that embrace uncertainty, moral complexity, and embodied understanding (Dickinson and Hadjimichael, 2023) the paper recasts the study of religion as a creative, collective—and eminently relevant—enterprise.

Panel 19: Millenarianism and Apocalypse – Contemporary Reflections

PG09 // Chair: J Crossley

1. Justin J. Meggitt, 'The Apocalyptic Littoral: Conceptualising Christadelphianism'

Drawing on Christadelphianism as a case study, this paper argues that the 'littoral', understood as a heuristic-analytical, processual model, offers a productive way to conceptualise the lived apocalypticisms of Christian adventist groups. The 'littoral' captures the dynamic boundary zone such believers inhabit — a liminal space characterised by the predictable and unpredictable, the erosive and accretive, and the proleptic and the protean. It also provides a more nuanced account of how Christadelphianism has sustained its eschatological intensity across generations without substantive adaptation in doctrine or practice, challenging the static sectarian explanation associated with Bryan R. Wilson. More broadly, the paper demonstrates how bringing a new theoretical abstraction into dialogue with lived religious praxis can generate fresh insights in apocalyptic studies today.

2. Anna-Sophia M. Roy, 'The New Apostolic Reformation: a challenge to traditional binary distinctions between pre-millennialism and post-millennialism?'

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), a network of charismatic leaders in the USA calling themselves modern-day apostles and prophets, provides a contemporary example through which to critically examine traditional binary distinctions between the categories of pre- and post-millennialism. NAR leaders espouse dominionist rhetoric through the authoritarian Seven Mountains Mandate (7MM) – the idea that Christians should sit atop key institutions in society to

re-establish Christian power on earth and bring about God's kingdom, in line with post-millennialist ideas. Alongside this, there is significant focus on spiritual warfare, linked to belief in an imminent apocalyptic battle that will play out in the American political sphere, portraying the 7MM as necessary to endure what is to come - closer to pre-millennialist thought. I will argue therefore that an examination of NAR leaders' discourse should prompt us to re-consider traditional distinctions between pre- and post-millennialism, and particularly their description as catastrophic versus progressive.

3. Joseph Webster, 'Whose Future Wins Out? "Taking Seriously" Multiple Millenarian Monopolies in the Field'

The Brethren of Gamrie, Aberdeenshire, and the Jehovah's Witnesses of Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim, both know that the world will soon end. Yet, while the Brethren and Witnesses agree that we currently stand upon an eschatological precise, they often view the semiotic content of each other's prophetic claims with amusement, or even disdain. In this context, what, if anything, can social anthropology bring to the conversation? Does the instinctive relativism of pre-1980s anthropology offer a solution to the analytical problem of what to do when encountering multiple millenarian monopolies during fieldwork? This paper explores these questions about the multiple and the monopolistic by grappling with the image of the Möbius strip – a surface which, despite all appearances, has only one side and one edge.

Panel 20: Hope on the Frontier: Productively Engaging Anthropology and Theology and the Futures they Create (CAT Panel 1)

PG 11 // Chair: S. Triffitt

1. Imad Ahmed, 'Moon Wars: Hope at the Frontier?'

The Islamic lunar calendar is a central part of demarcating Muslim ritual life, yet as it stands, there is no consensus on how the calendar should be constructed in the UK. Instead, diverse communities manage their own version of the Islamic calendar, using a range of scriptural readings, underpinned by different concepts of time, space, community and authority. My own research has uncovered at least thirteen calendars operational within the UK. Though these debates are incredibly rich, they have historically been acrimonious. Drawing on ethnographic research alongside extensive public engagement, this paper reflects on how public engagement (such as astronomy training) is not merely a site of dissemination, but a generative and collaborative space of meaning-making. Framing the Muslim diaspora as a 'frontier' community, I identify novel forms of localised religious expression, with themes of hope, belonging and healing that emerge amidst these debates.

2. Caroline Tee, Maan Al Dabbagh, Lili Di Puppò, 'A Theology of Resilience in the End Times: Muslims and Post-apocalyptic Anthropology'

Rather than seeing apocalypse as an event in the (distant) future, post-apocalyptic anthropology recognises that for many communities, the apocalypse is already well underway. How do people live in the shadow of the world's end? When life as we knew it is already ending, how do humans imagine and inhabit new futures? This collaborative paper combines ethnographic and theological

perspectives to explore the ways in which European Muslims live in the light of the end times. Drawing on 20th century Muslim thought, we identify and expound a contemporary Muslim theology of resilience in the face of existential crisis. We apply this theological framing to ethnographic observations within a Belgian Muslim community, which show how Muslim interlocutors accept the inevitability of the apocalypse without giving way to passive acceptance or despair.

3. Stav Shufan-Biton, “Just Follow the Magic”: Religious Attitudes and Holy Time among Jews as a Religious Minority in Britain’

This paper examines three forms of Jewish minority time: Shabbat, Jewish holidays, and encounters with local religious and civil calendars. Drawing on ongoing ethnographic research based on interviews and participant observation among Jewish communities in Cambridge and London, the study explores how cultural distance and temporary migration shape ritual life in diasporic contexts. The findings show that minority positioning enables selective and flexible engagement with ritual practices. Interviewees, especially those identifying as secular or traditional, maintain rituals they experience as meaningful, enjoyable, or family oriented, such as Hanukkah, Purim, and partial Sukkot observance, while halakhic routines normalized in Israel are less consistently sustained. Participants also engage in local practices such as Halloween, Christmas decorations, carol singing, and gift exchanges, interpreting them as cultural rather than religious. Building on the lived religion framework, the paper shows how partial incorporation of majority religious culture helps manage minority life while preserving Jewish distinction.

Breakout Session 6 (Friday 21 Aug, 11.30-13.00)

Panel 21: Hope on the Frontier: Productively engaging Anthropology and Theology and the Futures they Create (CAT Panel 2)

PG01 // Chair: J. Webster

1. Susie Triffitt, ‘Hope and “Home”lessness: Listening for Hope amongst the Homeless of Bradford’

This paper is based on my ongoing multi-year fieldwork with faith organisations supporting the homeless and precariously housed in Bradford, West Yorkshire, England. The UK has the highest rates of homelessness in the developed world. The number of homeless has increased rapidly since austerity in the 2010s and more recently in the wake of Covid and the cost of living crisis. Bradford is a deprived city with the highest violent crime in Europe. It has very little infrastructure to support its homeless and thus religious charities, predominantly Christian organisations, provide roughly 90% of food provision in the city centre. I will explore the role of faith and secularity in the daily lives of the homeless and faith’s importance to their construction of hopes. I will also reflect on the hope of homeless provision as a basis for interfaith engagement in a city charged with racial tensions.

2. Laure Montarry, 'Exploring 'God's Love' as a Model for a Good Christian Life in the Anglican Religion'

I shall examine the concept of 'love' as it is understood within the Anglican Church in the 21st century. In what ways is this emic concept of Christian love—inspired by the life and words of Jesus and transmitted in the Gospels—useful, both anthropologically and theologically, for reflecting on the contours of a fulfilled human existence, both within and outside the church community? And what are its limitations? I shall focus in particular on the types of emotional intimacy that unite God and the faithful, as well as embodied individuals with one another. I then hope to have the opportunity to extend this concept of Christian love and all that it implies in terms of ethics, discourse and practices beyond the religious sphere, in order to examine whether it is useful for exploring a new framework for the 'good life' in society.

3. Courtney Reeve, 'Challenging Hope: A Descent into the Ordinary'

While conducting theological ethnography at faith-based reconciliation be benefiting from the suffering of my interlocutors. From October 2022-2024, I asked 20 Palestinians and Israelis – from Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and non-faith traditions – to describe divine encounters throughout their involvement with Musalaha. Participants consistently expressed an expectation to share radical, miraculous experiences and referred to 'religion' as a superfluous or exaggerated aspect of their involvement. Their resistance to narrating extraordinary divine encounters heightened the need for deeper intersubjective analysis – was I, an outsider, unwittingly searching for “wonder-filled” stories to capture amazement and locate hope amidst despair? This paper turns to Veena Das' ethnography on violence to analyse divine encounters at Musalaha as a descent into the ordinary rather than grand gestures of transcendent ascent. In so doing, my Musalaha interlocutors challenge the outsider's instinctive search for hope in contexts of suffering and injustice.

Panel 22: At the Boundaries of 'Religion'

PG02 // Chair: A. Thomas

1. Philip Deslippe, 'Success Clubs of the Early-Twentieth Century and the Boundaries of Religion'

Numerous groups known as “success clubs” and “silent circles” developed across the Anglophone world at the turn of the century. Through periodicals and the mail, their members would connect with one another at a distance and send positive thoughts to enable well-being, health, and prosperity for themselves and each other. Many success clubs were founded by members of the positive thinking New Thought movement, and the clubs were seen within New Thought as both exemplars of their philosophy and a crass and dangerous exploitation of it, citing success clubs that were created by notorious frauds and con artists. Although success clubs shared practices and a sense of community, their members never knew or met each other. This paper charts the history of success clubs and examines them as liminal entities through which the boundaries between organized religion and decentralized spirituality, as well as sincere seeking and criminal enterprise, can be explored.

2. Andrew Kristoffer Dean, 'Do Atheists Daydream of Eschatological Sheep?'

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that animals are being reimagined as family members. Yet, with traditional religions such as Christianity typically offering little hope for animals in the afterlife, this study treads an unusual eschatological path, focusing on how atheists transgress against their day-to-day secular-materialist doctrines and daydream about their deceased pets at the Rainbow Bridge, i.e., Animal Heaven. Methodologically, this ethnographic UK study drew on 17 bereaved adults, using semi-structured interviews, followed by Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis. Key findings highlight that pet-based existential tensions frequently spark cathartic Rainbow Bridge daydreams, which not only mitigate grief, but allow atheists to continually create meaningful narratives about their deceased pets. However, far from overhauling ingrained atheist cosmologies, these otherworldly daydreams tend to create an ongoing knot of oscillating tensions between the supernatural and secular-material, as the bereaved try to make sense and reassert meaning within their daily lives.

3. Phillip Antilla, 'Where is Home? Pilgrimage and the Experience of Place'

The contemporary practice of pilgrimage has become an increasingly meaningful and popular way to engage with religion and spirituality. Recent literature has addressed many of the possible motivations for engaging in such activity (Reader 2007; Bailey 2022; King 2024). However, this paper argues that a commonly overlooked reason for pilgrimage practice is to experience a sense of 'home' – both during the journey itself and upon its conclusion. Using theories of 'home' and 'pilgrimage' in tandem with Edward Casey's philosophy of 'place', this paper suggests that 'home' is a dynamic and phenomenal embodied experience central to the practice of contemporary pilgrimage.

Panel 23: Religion, Conflict, and Empire

PG09 // Chair: M. Bowman

1. James A. Kapaló, 'Traversing Máriapócs: The Greek Catholic Church Across Frontiers'

This paper explores the varied ways in which the Greek Catholic pilgrimage site of Máriapócs in Eastern Hungary has served as a nexus for intercommunal and transnational contacts for the Greek Catholic Church during the twentieth century. Based on research in the Archives of the Hungarian State Security and recent ethnographic fieldwork, I sketch some episodes that illustrate the various ways in which the Ukrainian, Slovak, Romanian and Hungarian Greek Catholic communities maintained contact across the new frontiers created at the end of empires and during the Soviet-era. Pilgrimage to Máriapócs served to bridge geopolitical, national, linguistic and ethnic boundaries during communism in surprising ways, revealing the significance of transgressive forms of mobility. I argue in this paper that the peculiar liminal status of the Greek Catholic Church in Hungary and its principal pilgrimage site at Máriapócs, confounded attempts to control religious institutions and actors in the region.

2. Olesia Zhytkova, 'Orthodoxy at the Frontier: Russia's Weaponisation of the Church, War and Ukraine's Resistance'

The Russian-Ukrainian war has both military and cultural dimensions, and religion is a part of it. Against the backdrop of Russia's weaponisation of the Orthodox Church to secure ideological support for the war, recruit for the army and conduct anti-Ukrainian propaganda, it is particularly important to understand the origins of this phenomenon and analyse its current state. This will help to shape the future of Orthodoxy in a modern world and secure paths to contradict the adverse influence of the Russian Orthodox Church's missions in Europe. Drawing on primary sources, this paper examines the specific ways in which Russia has utilised the Church and Orthodoxy as an ideological imperial tool in previous centuries, the role of Russian Orthodoxy in shaping the doctrine of the "Russian World," religious factor of the war against Ukraine, and the resistance mounted by Ukrainian Orthodoxy as a struggle against neo-imperialism.

3. Hanna Kulahina-Stadnichenko, 'Religious Freedom and Its Framework in the Context of Socio-Political Transformations and War'

Contemporary armed conflicts, political instability, social fragmentation and ongoing geopolitical transformations are putting significant pressure on democratic institutions, undermining the rule of law and questioning the protection of fundamental human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. Today, religious freedom is increasingly becoming a broader socio-political phenomenon, going beyond the private sphere and embedded in issues of national security, identity and political influence. This raises a critical question: can religious freedom remain unrestricted in contexts where its exercise may threaten democratic stability? Experience shows that the absolutization of religious freedom in the absence of a clear legal framework and institutional capacity can pose risks to democratic governance. Cases of political instrumentalization of religion, external influence through religious structures and open collaboration of certain religious figures with occupying regimes during armed conflicts highlight the need to reassess the limits of this freedom.

Panel 24: Policy, Governance, Religion

PG11 // Chair: A. Grieser

1. Yafa Shanneik, 'The Frontiers of Kinship: Genetics, Religion and the Politics of Reproduction'

Governments are increasingly regulating marriages between close relatives through legislation and genetic screening, justified as public health interventions. These measures often target ethno-religious minority communities, framing consanguinity and endogamy as incompatible with dominant European societal norms. While presented as risk prevention, such policies can reinforce stigma and deepen social exclusion. For communities facing marginalisation or perceived existential threat, these marital practices often function as strategies of lineage preservation and communal survival. This paper introduces RELI-GENE, an interdisciplinary ERC-funded project examining how genetic healthcare policies intersect with religion and culture. It situates genetic counselling as a key site where reproductive futures are governed and contested, producing new frontiers between acceptable and unacceptable types of kinship. It explores how Haredi, Iraqi and Syrian Christian and Muslim families actively navigate and redefine these boundaries across

transnational contexts, illustrating how genetic knowledge reshapes belonging and redistributes authority between state, community and individual.

2. H. Şule Albayrak, 'From Prophecy to Politics: Christian Zionism'

Christian Zionism is a prominent theo-political discourse within American evangelical Protestantism, shaped by premillennialist eschatology and messianic expectations. Its significance extends beyond theology due to its influence on both domestic American politics and Middle Eastern geopolitics. This paper asks how Christian Zionism was historically constructed and how it continues to shape contemporary American politics. I argue that Christian Zionism, originating in nineteenth-century Britain and later institutionalized in the United States, should be understood as a socially constructed theo-political movement rather than merely a theological doctrine. From John Nelson Darby to John Hagee, religious leaders and political actors transformed biblical prophecy into a powerful political narrative. Using qualitative analysis of sermons, speeches, diaries, and reports, this paper examines how apocalyptic belief became a durable political project with global consequences.

3. Gizem Arikan and Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom, 'The Effects of Islamic Salience in Urban Space on Muslim Immigrants' Social Trust and Sense of Belonging'

The representation of Islam in public space is among the most contested issues in Western European politics. Some advocate regulatory restrictions on the public visibility of Islam while others argue that accommodating religious diversity signals acceptance and fosters belonging. Despite these intense debates, empirical evidence on how the salience of Islam in urban space affects Muslim immigrants' socio-political integration remains scarce. We address this gap using two original datasets. The first is an original survey of first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants in London, merged with geolocated data on the visible Islamic presence of each respondent's location, identified via the Google Maps API and content-coded by research assistants for type, size, and street-level visibility. Second, we conducted an online survey experiment among first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants residing in UK cities. Participants completed a simulated urban walk in which the treatment condition featured visible Islamic symbols (such as a mosque with a minaret and Islamic insignia on buildings) while the control condition presented an otherwise identical setting without them. In both datasets, we find that greater visible Islamic presence is positively associated with social and institutional trust, local place attachment, and host society identification among respondents. These findings have direct implications for how religious diversity is governed in multi-religious European cities, and speak to broader theoretical debates on symbolic recognition, minority belonging, and the politics of urban space.

13.00-13.45

Roundtable discussion and close of conference: 'Futures of the Academic Study of Religion'

PG01 // Chair: S. Owen

In recent years, religious studies programmes in universities have closed or been subsumed into larger programmes in so-called efficiency drives, and critical approaches have been regarded with suspicion. How should we as scholars of religion respond to the rapidly changing economic, political and institutional landscape of academia? How can we demonstrate to our students and

the wider public the importance of the study of religion? What exactly should we do as scholars of religion in this socio-political and economic moment?

Panellists: Paul-François Tremlett, Marion Bowman, Aled Thomas, Brad Anderson