

# Who Cares? Society, Religions, and the Concern for the Other

*2<sup>nd</sup> Religion and Society Conference*

Faculty of Theology, University of Malta

## ABSTRACTS

### Plenary Conference

#### **Jean Claude Attard**

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*The Perennial Other: Women and the Catholic Moral Imagination in Maltese Society*

Mediterranean societies have long negotiated identity through encounters with various “others”: pilgrims and pirates, colonial powers and migrants, tourists and strangers. In Malta, these figures have shaped cultural memory and ethical discourse in visible ways. This paper argues, however, that women represent a more enduring and less examined form of otherness within Maltese society, one that is neither excluded nor marginalised, but normalised and taken for granted. Drawing on cultural anthropology in dialogue with theological ethics, the paper examines linguistic patterns, everyday practices, and Catholic moral imagination to show how women are positioned as implicit bearers of moral stability and care, rendering their ethical agency largely invisible. The paper suggests that when such invisibility persists, ethical discourse risks losing credibility, and argues that any authentic ecclesial concern for the “other” must begin with a reconfiguration of the Church’s own moral imagination and practices of recognition.

Jean Claude Attard, born in Malta in 1992 and ordained to the priesthood in 2022, holds a master’s degree in environmental anthropology from the University of Aberdeen and a licentiate in pastoral theology from the University of Malta. He is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Theological Ethics within the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Vienna, where his research focuses on articulating an ethical anthropology shaped by the Mediterranean context.

## **Glen Attard**

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### *Training the Gaze: Spirituality, Cinema, and the Moral Imagination of Care*

In an age marked by geopolitical conflict, media saturation, and moral fatigue, care increasingly collapses into abstraction or selective concern. This paper argues that the contemporary crisis of care is rooted not primarily in ethical disagreement but in a deformation of perception. Drawing on spiritual traditions that understand contemplative and reflective practices as disciplines of attention, the paper proposes spirituality as a formative practice that trains the gaze to receive the other as presence rather than object or category. In dialogue with phenomenological insights and selected cinematic narratives, the paper explores how modern visual cultures both shape and erode “moral imagination” – i.e., the human capacity to perceive others as morally significant before making ethical judgments or decisions – by mediating suffering at a distance. Cinema, like spirituality, is shown to function as a school of perception, capable either of numbing attention or reawakening responsibility. Reframing care as a cultivated way of seeing offers a critical contribution to contemporary discussions on responsibility, vulnerability, and global ethical engagement.

Dr Glen Attard is a resident academic at the Faculty of Theology, University of Malta, where he lectures on spirituality and spiritual companionship. He holds a doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University, specialising in the mystagogy of Pavel Florensky. His teaching and research focus on Christian spirituality from interdisciplinary and interreligious perspectives, with a particular interest in psychospiritual growth, discernment, spiritual companionship, and the development and inculturation of mysticism. He coordinates the MA in Spirituality course and is the co-founder of the Maltese Association for the Study of Spirituality and Spiritual Companionship. He previously served as Executive Director of the Carmelite Institute Malta. He also works in primary school education, supporting children with diverse behavioural, emotional, and learning needs as a Learning Support Educator.

## John Berry

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### *Care Beyond Proximity: Becoming Responsible for the Other*

This paper examines responsibility toward the Other through a religious lens, focusing on biblical texts (Leviticus 19:18, Luke 10, Matthew 25) and their interpretation in Christian ethics. It analyzes the *ordo amoris*, the ethical ordering of love, as a dynamic between the near and distant, insiders and strangers, showing how ethical responsibility emerges from recognizing the Other as fellow human. Drawing on modern Jewish and Christian thought (Buber, Rosenzweig, Cohen, Lévinas) and comparative insights from Islamic ethics on compassion and charity, the paper argues that genuine care is not proximity-dependent but grounded in religiously-informed moral imagination and ethical action.

John Anthony Berry (editor) is Associate Professor of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology and former Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta. He studied at the Pontifical Gregorian University and KU Leuven, developing expertise in Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph Ratzinger, and Yves Congar OP. He served as President of *Societas Oecumenica* (2018–2022) and as a member of the international Presidium of the *European Society for Catholic Theology* (2017–2021), and he co-founded the international journal *Theology and Philosophy of Education*. He is also convenor of the first International Conference on Religion and Society and has actively worked for dialogue and peace, particularly through academic and philanthropic networks, as well as through his involvement in the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue.

## **Jimmy Bonnici - Patricia Bonello**

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### *We Care: The Role of Priests in Maltese Society Today*

Maltese society has moved from being homogeneously centred on the Catholic religion to secularisation and diversity. This rapid transformation, as well as other contextual issues which include a sharp reduction in the number of religious vocations, has necessitated a reframing of the role of the Catholic priest within this society. The presentation will draw on qualitative research on the perception of priests within Maltese society, indicating the expectations of Catholic priests, how they attempt to meet these expectations and the impact which occupying this role has on them. It will highlight the caring role which priests still occupy, and the challenge to implement this role within the current context, including issues of training and support. This presentation will invite the audience to critically reflect on the role of Catholic priests and how they can continue to serve as enduring beacons of pastoral care within an ever-evolving Maltese society.

Rev Dr John Mary (Jimmy) Bonnici is a diocesan priest of the Archdiocese of Malta and a part-time lecturer within the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta. Born in Mosta in 1972, the second of four sons, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1998. He holds a Licentiate in Pastoral Theology from the University of Malta and a Doctorate in Spiritual Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Fr Bonnici has over fifteen years of experience serving as a religious counsellor in an independent school. He currently serves as Rector of the Archbishop's Seminary in Malta and as General Secretary of the Maltese Episcopal Conference, roles through which he contributes to priestly formation and to the life and mission of the Church in Malta. Within the Faculty of Theology, he lectures in Pastoral Theology and Spiritual Theology. His academic and pastoral interests focus particularly on the contextual dimensions that shape pastoral care, as well as on the development of Christian spirituality across the different stages of life.

Dr Patricia Bonello (Doctor of Social Science, Cork) is currently the Chief Research Officer at Discern, responsible for research within the Archdiocese of Malta, a post she has held for the past three years. Dr Bonello, a social worker by profession, previously worked in frontline social work and social work management in various sectors and still supervises a number of social workers, from the State and NGO sectors, including Church NGOs. She also lectured within the Department for Social Policy and Social Work for many years, five of which as a full-time lecturer. She has contributed to the Catholic Church in different projects and initiatives over the years. Her research interests include identity, a topic she explored in her doctoral research, spirituality and all matters related to the functioning of the Catholic Church.

## **Dorianne Buttigieg**

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### *Anamnesis and Care: Temporal Dimensions of Authentic Christian Worship*

The theological concept of anamnesis has long been understood as central to the structure of Christian liturgy, particularly within Eucharistic theology. Rather than a mere psychological recollection, anamnesis the Church's entry into "the reality of the Kingdom," wherein past, present, and future are held together in a sacramental mode of time. By examining the temporal structure of anamnesis — where past salvific events are made present and oriented toward eschatological fulfillment—the study demonstrates how liturgy becomes a locus of pastoral care. Worship is shown to integrate human suffering, memory, and hope into a transformative encounter with divine grace.

Dorianne Buttigieg (PhD) is a lecturer in liturgy and liturgical studies at the University of Malta. Her research interests include liturgical studies, liturgical catechesis and the intersection between liturgy and ecumenism.

## **Jude Thaddaeus Buyondo**

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*Intergenerational Human Flourishing: The Chinese Rites Controversy and Contemporary Epigenetic–Psychotherapeutic Insights*

This paper argues that human flourishing is fundamentally intergenerational and cannot be reduced to individual longevity or material well-being. Revisiting the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Chinese Rites Controversy, it examines how Christian theology negotiated Confucian ancestral practices and, in doing so, implicitly addressed questions of moral continuity, filial responsibility, and intergenerational belonging. While Aristotelian–Thomistic ethics defines flourishing as the virtuous fulfilment of human capacities, it has insufficiently theorized ancestral relationships as constitutive of moral life. Through historical-theological analysis in dialogue with contemporary epigenetic and psychotherapeutic research on intergenerational transmission and trauma, the paper develops the concept of intergenerational human flourishing. It argues that ancestral memory, ritual continuity, and inherited patterns of resilience or suffering shape identity, moral agency, and social cohesion. Human flourishing thus emerges as relational, transgenerational, and normatively structured across past, present, and future.

Mag. Dr Jude Thaddaeus Buyondo, BA, is a moral theologian affiliated with the University of Vienna, specializing in Intercultural Theological Bioethics and Afro-Euro-American religions. His research focuses on natural law, virtue ethics, animal ethics, bioethics, intergenerational justice, and the dialogue between Christian theology and Afro-Euro-American moral traditions. Working at the intersection of moral theology, intercultural ethics, and interdisciplinary health research, he explores relational anthropology, ancestral ethics, and human flourishing as a transgenerational moral reality shaped by memory, ritual, and intergenerational responsibility. He is the author of, *Holistic Bioethics*, Eugene [Oregon] 2024 and *The Critique of Bioethical Principlism in Contrast to an African Approach to Bioethics*, Eugene [Oregon] 2024.

## **Therese Comodini Cachia**

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*Duty of Care and Environmental Stewardship:*

*A Comparative Analysis of the ECHR and Laudato Si'.*

This study explores the convergence between legal and moral frameworks in addressing the global environmental crisis. It offers a comparative analysis of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) jurisprudence and Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, examining how each articulates a duty of care toward the environment. While the ECHR emphasizes State obligations to protect fundamental rights—particularly the right to life (Article 2) and the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8)—*Laudato Si'* promotes an “integral ecology,” linking environmental degradation with social breakdown. Both frameworks are grounded in scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change and its threat to human rights and planetary wellbeing. By analyzing case law alongside theological and moral reasoning, the study seeks to identify the extent to which faith-based moral responsibilities resonate with legal duties, providing insights into the interplay between law, ethics, and environmental stewardship.

## **Yvonne Dohna Schlobitten**

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### *Does Art Care about Us?*

David Brooks in the New York Times writes that part of the reason we as a society have become so sad, lonely, angry, and mean is because so many people haven't been taught, or don't bother, to engage compassionately. Our problem is not just that we are over-politicized and at the same time increasingly under-moralized, under-spiritualized, and especially, he says, under-cultured. Romano Guardini goes a step further. Starting with a letter, he aims to show that we can see care through art. "Once you've seen the child, you have to love it." The question is, what do we really see in art and how should we look at it? What truly happens in the encounter with art beyond psychological and aesthetic experiences? Does art care about us and thereby enable caring love?

Yvonne Dohna Schlobitten, after studying jurisprudence, the sciences of art, and the philosophy of media, was a Max Planck fellow at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, where she earned an interdisciplinary PhD in philosophy with Prof. H. Belting on 'Canova and the Nationality of Cultural Heritage'. She specializes in 'droit international e comparé' (CTL, Geneva), 'Philosophie der Religion' (Université de Fribourg), and 'Spiritual Theology' (Teresianum, Rome). She is Professor of History, Philosophy, and Spirituality of Art and Culture at the Pontifical Gregorian University, where she also teaches in the new Catholic Studies program. She has been a visiting professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) in Mexico. She has been collaborating for several years on "Romano Guardini" with the research center The McLean Center for the Study of Culture and Values (MCSCV) at The Catholic University of America (CUA) and developed a recent joint project on "The Ascesis of Thinking in Socrates, Buddha, and Christ" with the patronage of the Rome Catholic Studies Program. Her field of research is silence and the epistemology of seeing. She is a member of the editorial board of *Donne Chiesa Mondo* of the Osservatore Romano, vice president of the Centro di Formazione alla Meditazione Cristiana (CFMC) in Rome, and founder of the Intercultural School of Silence (ISS). She is a spiritual guide for silence in an interreligious context. In 2022, she received the 'Premio Basilicata di Letteratura Spirituale e Poesia Religiosa' for her Opera Omnia.

## **Joseph Ellul O.P.**

Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Angelicum

### *Religious Leadership: Service and Solidarity*

The purpose of this paper is to first reflect upon the social reality which we live in, especially in Europe, a reality marked by pluralism, cultural diversity, and moral relativism frequently to the detriment of freedom of expression. On the political spectrum, the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and in the Middle East, have clearly demonstrated that in spite of an apparent political union, Europe can hardly speak with a common voice on any issue. This present environment, therefore, demands much from religious leaders. They are called upon to rise to the above-mentioned challenges, and to provide their followers with much needed inspiration, direction and hope for a better and more dignified destiny for humanity.

Joseph Ellul O.P. is Adjunct Professor at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas lecturing in the Faculty of Theology within the Ecumenical and Interreligious Section as well as in the Thomistic Section and in the Institute of Religious Sciences Mater Ecclesiae. He is also Guest Professor in the Faculty of Philosophy. Professor Ellul also lectures at the Faculty of Theology (Department of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology) as well as in the Department of Philosophy and in the Department of Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures of the University of Malta. He has also published widely and participated in numerous international conferences. In 2017 Prof. Ellul was awarded the title of *Magister Sacrae Theologiae* by the Order of Preachers in recognition of his academic work. At present he is also the Provincial Promoter for Interreligious Dialogue and carries out pastoral duties in the Parish of Our Lady of Porto Salvo and St Dominic in Valletta.

## **Danica Igrutinovic**

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*My Brother's (Jail) Keeper: The Discourse on Justice, Order, and Community in the Serbian Orthodox Church's Public Responses to the Student Protest Movement*

After the fall of the concrete canopy on the newly reconstructed train station in Novi Sad killed 16 people, Serbia has been experiencing the largest student movement in Europe since 1968, whose demands are justice and an end to corruption that kills. This paper will deal with the responses from Serbian Orthodox Church dignitaries and other church-related public voices to this social phenomenon. The responses and the ensuing debates available in online media will be traced historically and subjected to critical discourse analysis. Of particular interest to this paper will be how this discourse frames justice (heavenly and earthly), order (hierarchies, church-state relations, but also geopolitical considerations), and community (the church, the nation, humanity).

Key words: student protest movement, Serbian Orthodox Church, justice, order, community.

Danica Igrutinović has published multiple articles dealing with the intersection of religion, politics, sexuality and gender, both in the context of media content analysis and literary analysis. Her book *The Sacred and Sacrilege in Postsecular Serbia* (Biblos 2023, Bloomsbury 2026) tackles discourse surrounding accusations of blasphemy in a political context. Igrutinović is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade, where she has been teaching since 2008.

## Jozef Jančovič

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*From Conquest to Compassion: The Care of Captives and Moral Responsibility in the Warfare Narrative of 2 Chronicles 28:8-15*

In 2 Chron 28:8–15, the prophet Oded confronts the Israelite army after its defeat of Judah and the capture of 200,000 Judean women and children. Rather than affirming the victory, Oded rebukes the soldiers, reminding them that Judah's defeat resulted from God's judgment for sin, not Israel's moral superiority. To enslave their kin, he warns, would only intensify Israel's own guilt and provoke further divine wrath. Appealing to conscience and fear of God, Oded demands the release of the captives. Leaders from Ephraim support his appeal, arguing that retaining the captives would compound Israel's transgressions. The response is striking: the captives are freed and treated with compassion – clothed, fed, anointed, given sandals (shoes), and transported by donkey to Jericho, where they are reunited with their families. Such detailed care represents an exceptional moment of mercy within the violent context of ancient warfare and highlights repentance enacted through concrete action. The pericope encourages the readers not to think in terms of own nationalistic tribal loyalties but to be involved in caring deeds of compassion to sufferers whoever they are. Contemporary biblical scholarship approaches this episode as a Chronicles-specific theological narrative emphasizing mercy, communal responsibility, and the ethical limits of power. It is also studied as an example of prophetic authority restraining military ambition. In reception-historical studies, scholars note thematic parallels with Luke's parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), suggesting the Chronicler's influence on later Jewish and Christian ethics of compassion and neighborly love.

Jozef Jančovič is Associate Professor of Catholic theology and dean of the Roman Catholic Faculty of Theology at Comenius University in Bratislava. He studied biotechnology at the Slovak Technical University before completing theological studies in Bratislava and Rome, earning a licentiate in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute and a PhD in biblical theology in 2009. He completed his habilitation in biblical exegesis and theology in 2020. A priest of the Archdiocese of Bratislava, he has held several pastoral appointments alongside his academic career. His research focuses on biblical exegesis, biblical languages, and theology of Scripture, and he has participated in numerous national research projects. He is actively involved in editorial boards and European scholarly societies.

## **Przemysław Kantyka**

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### *Anthropological Choice as a Determinant in the Approach to Man, society and Nature*

The research problem addressed in this article is the question of how a specific anthropological choice influences the perception of the value of human life, the approach to social issues, and the definition of the relationship between man and nature. The article will demonstrate that the views and attitudes that have a huge impact on the three elements mentioned above are based on a fundamental anthropological choice, i.e. the type of anthropology adopted in the basic assumptions. Step by step, it will be shown why it is worthwhile to adopt the perspective of anthropology contained in Christianity, and specifically in the Roman Catholic faith. Accepting the dependence of human beings as creatures on God the Creator not only organises relations between human communities, but also organises our relations with one another as individuals, protects the sanctity of human life, and defines the responsible relationship between human beings and nature.

Przemysław Kantyka is a full professor at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, where he serves as Dean of the Faculty of Theology. He is the author of over 100 scholarly articles, four monographs, and one co-authored volume. His research interests include post-Reformation theology—particularly Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist traditions—ecumenical dialogue and the reception of its outcomes, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, Mariology, eco-theology, and the doctrinal and social activities of global ecumenical organizations.

## Ondřej Kolář

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### *God Who Cares: Divine providence and human responsibility*

This contribution explores how it is possible today to conceive of a God caring for his creation in a context where belief in divine providence has been profoundly shaken—both in academic theology and in the everyday spirituality of believers. Based on key contemporary debates about God's action and drawing on biblical ideas about God's care, the article seeks to restore a theologically responsible and existentially credible account of God's sustaining and guiding presence. It argues for a renewed understanding of divine care that avoids two problematic extremes; on the one hand, a naïve image of God who replaces human agency and takes over our responsibilities; on the other, a deistic or practically indifferent conception in which God withdraws from the world and leaves its fate entirely in human hands. Instead, the paper proposes a relational model of providence that affirms both divine faithfulness and authentic human responsibility.

Mgr. Ondřej Kolář Th.D. (\*1978) is an assistant professor in the Department of Systematic Theology at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague and serves as pastor of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren parish in Prague-Kobylisy. He studied theology in Prague and Vienna and pursued postgraduate studies in Tübingen and Erlangen. His primary research interest is eschatology and its relationship to anthropology and soteriology. Through his involvement with the Central European Centre of Mission Studies, he has also explored systematic theological approaches to mission. He is the author of the monograph *Happiness as a Theme of Contemporary Theology*.

## **Kornélia Kolářová Takácsová**

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*Caring women in the Middle Ages: An excursion into female spirituality in medieval Central European society in the 13th century*

This contribution focuses on the spiritual aspect of caring for the poor and people in need as one of the earliest manifestations of female spirituality that could be practiced in everyday life. The understanding of everyday service as a conscious link between faith and responsibility for others fundamentally shaped the form of medieval Christian charity. Attention will be paid primarily to women from Central Europe who came from ruling dynasties. The prototype of this type of holiness was St Elizabeth of Thuringia, whose life inspired St Agnes of Bohemia and St Margaret of Hungary, representatives of the mendicant orders. Through their actions, other royal daughters and widows also sent a strong signal to emerging urban communities in the 13th century. Their example of care was followed by women from lower social classes, including beguines. The contribution will address the topic at the intersection of theology and art history, also employing iconographic methodology.

Mgr. et Mgr. Kornélia Kolářová Takácsová, Th.D., Ph.D. (\*1979) is an assistant professor at the Institute of Christian Art History, Catholic Theological Faculty, Charles University in Prague. She studied Protestant theology in Prague, Erlangen, and Vienna, and later art history in Prague, Budapest, and Vienna. Her research focuses on spirituality in the Middle Ages and its manifestations in visual culture (including nunneries), Christian iconography, and contemporary art. She has led international grant projects focused on researching medieval female religiosity and the position of women in society. She is the editor of the collective monograph *Women in the Middle Ages: Founders, Mothers, and Patrons*. She is currently a member of the project *Theological Anthropology in an Intercultural Perspective*.

**Piotr Kopiec**

**Sławomir Pawłowski**

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*Rediscovering Christian Determinants of the Social Problem Theory and The Theory of Welfare State*

The Christian determinants of the modern concept of the welfare state and the theory of social problems are often overlooked or forgotten today. However, they can be considered an integral driving force behind today's vision of a good state, based on the principles of justice, freedom, solidarity, and responsibility. Research into these Christian roots is an important part of sociological and historical studies of modernity and its historical processes (such as the emergence of the welfare state). The article analyses selected Christian determinants of the welfare state in two dimensions: historical and ideal. It therefore addresses theological trends such as the social gospel and refers to Christian universals that have been integral to Western culture for centuries: the Christian tradition of dealing with the poor, Christian universalism, and the affirmation of everyday life.

**Piotr Kopiec** is a professor of Theology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and holds a doctorate in Sociology. His research interests include the social teaching of Christian churches, interfaith relations, the systematics of the ecumenical movement, Protestant theology and its impact on culture and society, the ecumenical assessment of contemporary global economic, social, and cultural processes, as well as the culture of remembrance. He has received several grants from the National Science Centre and the National Program for the Development of Humanities in Poland. He is the author of seven scientific monographs and over 150 articles in scientific journals.

**Sławomir Pawłowski** serves as Head of the Ecumenical Section of the Institute of Theology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and is Secretary of the Council for Ecumenism of the Polish Episcopal Conference. His scholarly research focuses on Catholic principles of ecumenism, the principle of the hierarchy of the truths of faith, the history of the ecumenical movement, ecumenical commentary on the Christian Creed, and Pentecostal theology.

## **Aini Linjakumpu**

University of Lapland

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*From Harm to Care: Transformative Responses to Spiritual Violence in Religious Communities*

This presentation conceptualises spiritual violence as a form of harm that demands collective responsibility and transformative institutional responses. Spiritual violence refers to psychological, physical, emotional, or existential harm legitimised through religious beliefs, communal norms, or structures of authority. Such harm is analysed as a communal failure of care embedded in asymmetrical power relations and institutional practices. The central argument is that effective responses require more than identifying perpetrators or offering pastoral reconciliation. Instead, they demand transformative change within religious communities. The presentation outlines transformation on three interconnected levels: moral (redefining responsibility and vulnerability), institutional (developing transparent structures of accountability and external oversight), and theological-narrative (reinterpreting doctrines and religious languages that normalise suffering or silence victims). This transformation is approached as a form of collective care: an ongoing process through which communities learn to recognise previously invisible harm, reimagine responsibility, and reorganise practices to protect those in positions of dependency.

Aini Linjakumpu is Professor of Politics of Religions and Cultures at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, Finland. For over 25 years, her research has focused on the political dimensions of religion, particularly Islam and, more recently, Christian movements and denominations. Her theoretical work engages with communities, violence, network politics, and the politics of emotions. She has authored three monographs on Islam, three on Conservative Laestadianism and other Christian communities, one on spiritual violence, and co-authored one on religious literacy. In addition, she has edited seven volumes and published over 50 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters.

## **Pavle Mijović**

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*The Reimagination of Care in the Contemporary World:*

*From Philosophical Reflection to Ethical Action*

The contemporary world—marked by uncertainty, systemic risk, social fragmentation, and rising polarization—poses significant challenges to traditional notions of ethical responsibility and social care. Long central to ethical philosophy, the concept of care requires renewed examination in light of contemporary global dynamics. The first part of this paper situates care within major philosophical traditions. From Aristotle’s practical wisdom and the Stoics’ cosmopolitan concern to the medieval notion of *caritas*, care has functioned as a guiding ethical principle, now reshaped by global interdependence, technological mediation, and social complexity. The second part examines care through the lens of contemporary critical thought. Here, care extends beyond individual virtue or interpersonal ethics to become a framework for analyzing power relations, inequality, and social responsibility. Closely linked to social justice and intersectionality, care emerges as a critical and political practice that foregrounds relationality, mutual dependence, and systemic critique, while interrogating the conditions that enable ethical action in unequal societies. Drawing on recent sociological scholarship, the third part reimagines care as both a philosophical and practical response to vulnerability, unpredictability, and moral disagreement. Integrating insights from virtue ethics, ethics of care, comparative religious and secular traditions, and agonistic pluralism, the paper argues that care can foster constructive engagement amid conflict and diversity. Ultimately, it proposes care as a vital ethical orientation for addressing global crises, migration, and environmental uncertainty.

Pavle Mijović (b. 1984, Sarajevo) is associate professor of philosophy at the Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Sarajevo, where he has chaired the Department of Philosophy since 2013. He studied theology at the University of Zagreb and the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome, graduating in 2008, and completed a master’s degree and doctorate in philosophy at the same institution (2010; 2012). He also earned a master’s degree in Peace Building Management from the Pontifical Seraphicum University and, in 2024, a master’s degree in international relations and diplomacy from the University of Sarajevo. He has participated in European research projects including RESILIENCE (Horizon 2020) and DisInfo Academy (Erasmus+). He is affiliated with the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **Fateme Najjarzadehgan**

University of Tehran

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*Qur'ānic Ethics of Care Toward Women:*

*Marriage, Divorce, and the Moral Grammar of Protection*

This paper examines the Qur'ān's ethics of care toward women through its family-related discourse on marriage, divorce, and post-separation responsibilities. Using close textual analysis of recurring terms—*ma'rūf*, *iḥsān*, *ḍarar*, *taqwā*, and *ḥudūd Allāh*—it argues that Qur'ānic legal-ethical language forms a coherent moral framework centered on protection from harm, dignity, and relational responsibility. The Qur'ān consistently limits coercion, discourages exploitation, and frames family life as a site of moral accountability. Care, in this reading, is not merely a private virtue but a normative principle embedded in legal discourse, connecting intimate relations with broader social justice. The paper contributes to interdisciplinary debates on religion, care, and responsibility.

Fateme Najjarzadehgan (b. September 13, 1997) is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Thought, University of Tehran. She holds a Ph.D. in Qur'an and Hadith Sciences from the University of Tehran (2024). Her research focuses on Qur'anic interpretation, with particular emphasis on gender and women's studies in Islam. She has published in Iranian and international journals, including *The Muslim World*, and has presented her research at international venues such as the International Qur'anic Studies Association (IQSA, 2025), the International Conference on Islamicate Digital Humanities (2024), and the workshop "Global Shi'ism: Migrations, Diasporas and the Islamic Revival in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" at the University of Oxford (2025).

## **Rastislav Nemec**

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### *The Philosophical Aspects of Permanent Crisis as an Opportunity for Human Mutuality*

This paper is based on a philosophical analysis of certain socio-cultural phenomena which, after many years of scientific and social cooperation, indicate the emergence of various forms of social decline and isolation. The article aims to analyse the reasons for the onset of the modern social crisis, a topic that is being discussed with increasing frequency. This crisis is not only a matter of geopolitical and economic isolation, but also of phenomena that affect human relationships deeply. The crisis is further intensified and justified by the identity crisis of young people and the emergence of new forms of the entertainment industry that do not help them to find themselves or answer their questions, but rather make them question themselves.

Rastislav Nemec is a university professor and the guarantor of the Civic Education Study Programme at the Department of Pedagogical Studies at the Faculty of Education of Trnava University in Trnava.. His work focuses on the intercultural and interdisciplinary overlaps of philosophical topics within contemporary society and on the ways these topics permeate and take shape as various social and cultural phenomena. His research include the history of thought, philosophical reflections concerning the human being and society, and recurring as well as emerging themes in education.

**Birutė Obelenienė**

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*Contradictions between Understanding Sexuality in Catholic Education (CE) and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)*

Today, many countries around the world are debating the concept of sexuality and its education. As noted by the Congregation for Catholic Education, “We are now facing with what might accurately be called an educational crisis, especially in the field of affectivity and sexuality”.<sup>1</sup> The presentation raises the problem that understanding sexuality in comprehensive sexual education strongly contradicts an understanding of sexuality in Catholic education. To establish these contradictions and main differences, the qualitative content analysis method was used to evaluate the concept of sexuality in the content of the International Technical Guidance on sexuality education (UNESCO, 2018) from a Christian anthropological perspective. An evaluation of the comprehensive sexuality education document in the light of Christian anthropology reveals that the concept of sexuality in comprehensive sexuality education is fundamentally inconsistent with the concept of sexuality in Catholic education.

Birutė Obelenienė is Professor of Theology and Senior Researcher at the Research Center on Marriage and Family, Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), where she also serves as Senator. She holds a Master’s degree from Kaunas Medical Institute, Faculty of Pharmacy, and a PhD from VMU (2007). She has authored over 50 publications, including the monograph *From Birth Control to Self-Awareness and Free, Informed Decision-Making*, co-authored *Medicine, Ethics, and Law Regarding the Human Until Birth*, and the books *Ethics of Sexuality Education and Fertility Awareness and Natural Family Planning*. She is Vice-Chair of the editorial board of *Soter*, director of the Master’s program *Family Research*, and an expert for the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science. Her research focuses on sexuality education, bioethics, conjugal ethics, and youth preparation for family life.

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education. “Male and Female He Created Them”. *Towards A Path Of Dialogue on The Question of Gender Theory in Education*, Vatican City, 2019, 1.

## **Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke**

UCLouvain, Belgium

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### *Beyond Othering: Reframing Religious Difference for Peacebuilding*

Religious difference is often framed through an othering paradigm that positions religious outsiders as fundamentally separate from the self (insiders), fostering antagonism (categorized as stranger, enemy) rather than connection (neighbour, friend). Drawing on phenomenological insights of Bernhard Waldenfels that challenge this self/other binary, this paper argues that peacebuilding requires reconceptualizing how we encounter religious difference. It applies the framework of 'identity-in-difference' to go beyond the predominant representations of the other, as an isolated difference, in view of peacebuilding. This paper will thus explore how the paradigm of identity-in-difference creates a space where the conceptualization of the self incorporates the tensed relationship with that which is different. This approach critiques both the tendentious juxtapositioning of insider-outsider elements as well as the dismissal of inherent tension that exists in certain formulations of unity. In terms of praxis, the second task of this paper is to articulate ways of applying the framework of identity-in-difference in the task of peacebuilding, in spite of inherent tension, such as power asymmetries, political motives, and religious doctrines. Traversing these representations of the other, as enemy, stranger, neighbour, and friend, the goal is to demonstrate that transforming perceptions of religious others from 'enemy' to 'friend' requires an hermeneutical reframing that has practical consequences.

Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke is assistant professor of Catholic ecclesiology and ecumenism at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies (THER) and is a member of the research institute of Religions, Spiritualities, Cultures, Societies (RSCS) at UCLouvain, Belgium. Ikenna is the author of *Ecumenical and Interreligious Identities in Nigeria: Transformation through Dialogue* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022). He is also the director of Centre Vincent Lebbe and a member of the PACTPAN. His research interests include ecclesiology, ecumenism, African Christianity, interreligious dialogue, intercultural, postcolonial and decolonial theologies.

## **Andrii Paliukh**

Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University, Ukraine

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This paper examines the legal frameworks governing humanitarian care in Ukraine, with a focus on the role of national and international law in ensuring protection and assistance for vulnerable populations during the Russian-Ukrainian. It argues that a combination of domestic legislation, international humanitarian law, and human rights norms creates both opportunities and challenges for the effective delivery of aid. Using a doctrinal and analytical approach, the study analyzes Ukrainian laws, international treaties, and institutional regulations, as well as selected case examples of humanitarian initiatives. The paper highlights how legal frameworks shape the responsibilities of state authorities, religious institutions, and civil society actors in providing social and humanitarian care. By situating humanitarian assistance within a legal context, the research contributes to understanding the interplay between law, ethics, and social solidarity in times of crisis.

Andrii Paliukh is a Doctor of Legal Sciences and Associate Professor at Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University (Ukraine), specializing in constitutional and municipal law. His research explores the legal frameworks that govern state and local governance, the protection of human rights, and the rule of law.

## **Mateja Pevec Rozman**

University of Ljubljana

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*We Have Never Been Independent: Dependence, Virtue, and Moral Responsibility Toward the Other*

Modern moral philosophy has long been based on the idea of the autonomous, self-sufficient rational agent. This lecture challenges that foundational assumption by drawing on Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals* and the feminist ethics of care tradition. MacIntyre argues that vulnerability and dependence are not peripheral exceptions to human life but its permanent condition - and that the virtues required to respond to this condition form the very core of moral existence. Through the concepts of 'virtues of acknowledged dependence' and 'networks of giving and receiving,' the lecture develops a relational moral anthropology in which relationships, community, not autonomy, is the ground of human flourishing. The implications for contemporary ethical theory and practice are substantial and far-reaching.

Mateja Pevec Rozman is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana. Her research spans philosophical anthropology, virtue ethics, ethics of care, and the philosophy of culture, with particular attention to questions of human vulnerability, resilience, and the moral dimensions of dependence. She has published extensively on the intersection of classical virtue ethics and contemporary moral challenges, including the ethics of resilience in times of global uncertainty.

## **Piotr Roszak**

Nicolas Copernicus University

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### *Can AI Care? Cognitive Safety and the Limits of Technological Compassion*

As artificial intelligence increasingly mediates practices of care, religion, and support, the question is no longer whether AI can assist human concern, but whether it can care without eroding the cognitive and relational conditions that make care genuinely human. This paper examines the limits of AI-mediated care through the lens of cognitive safety, understood as the protection of persons' capacity for moral discernment, relational agency, and responsibility. Drawing on my previous work on religion and cognitive safety, I argue that AI and robotic systems may support practices of care instrumentally, yet they cannot substitute for the interpersonal encounter that constitutes authentic concern for the other. Engaging Thomas Aquinas's account of love of neighbor as a relational act grounded in personal presence, and contemporary theological reflections on AI (notably Ted F. Peters, Montoya-Gimenez Amaya, Platonvjak-Brumec), the paper highlights the positive epistemic role of religion in sustaining human agency in contexts of vulnerability. Religion, I suggest, functions as a cognitive and moral scaffold that resists the algorithmic outsourcing of care while integrating technological assistance without anthropological reduction.

Piotr Roszak is Deputy-Dean for Research and Professor of Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Theology, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland; Associate Professor of the University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain; an ordinary member of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas; an editor-in-chief of *Scientia et Fides* and the series *Scholastica Thoruniensia* which specializes in publishing translations of mediaeval biblical commentaries.

## Wasim Salman

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### *Care as Being-With Others: Reflections for Religion and Society*

This lecture explores the philosophical and theological meaning of “care of the other” by comparing three major figures of twentieth-century thought: Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Karl Rahner. Starting with Heidegger’s analysis in *Being and Time*, we examine *Sorge* (care) as the basic structure of *Dasein*. For Heidegger, being human is being-in-the-world and being-with others (*Mitsein*). Care is not first a moral attitude but an ontological condition: existence structured through concern, projection, and shared worldhood. The lecture clarifies how Heidegger distinguishes authentic and inauthentic modes of solicitude (*Fürsorge*), and how these shape our relation to others without grounding ethics in responsibility as a primary category.

In contrast, Levinas reorients philosophy from ontology to ethics. For Levinas, the encounter with the face of the Other precedes comprehension. I am responsible for the Other before any contract, reciprocity, or theoretical understanding. The lecture examines how Levinas critiques Heidegger’s prioritization of Being and proposes instead an ethics of infinite responsibility. By placing these approaches in dialogue, the lecture highlights a philosophical shift: from care as an existential structure to responsibility as an ethical demand that exceeds ontology.

Rahner’s thought is rooted in transcendental theology and his understanding of the human person as oriented toward God. Although he does not develop a systematic ethics of care in the contemporary philosophical sense, care emerges within his anthropology and theology of grace. For Rahner, the human being is a “hearer of the Word,” characterized by openness to the mystery of God. This openness structures existence as relational, responsible, and self-transcending. Care is not merely an emotional disposition or social practice, but an expression of the person’s orientation toward the Absolute. Since grace is offered to every person as the condition for freedom and transcendence, human acts of love, solidarity, and responsibility participate in God’s self-communication.

Born in 1976 in Damascus, Wasim Salman is the president of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) in Rome, where he has been a professor of contemporary Arab-Islamic thought since 2016. A Syrian-Italian, he is a member of the editorial board of *Islamochristiana* and the research platform *Pluriel* on Islam in Europe and Lebanon. He holds a doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University (2009) and in Arabic philosophy from the University of Tor Vergata (2016), and has taught Catholic theology in Italy. He is the author of “Political Islam and the Challenges of Interpretation. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd” (Mimesis, 2017) and “Gadamer e I teologi” (UUP, 2012).

## Hector Scerri

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*Jean Valjean's Iconic TLC: Some socio-theological footnotes to Victor Hugo's Les Miserables*

This paper seeks to engage the conference participants as they reflect on the main character in Victor Hugo's masterpiece *Les Miserables*. Jean Valjean, a former convict, sentenced to forced labour at the naval shipyards of Toulon in 19th century France, undergoes a radical transformation when the once-bitter social outcast encounters Mgr Bienvenu, a kind prelate who redeems" his soul, while urging him to do good. The name given by Victor Hugo to this iconic figure already sheds light on the profound experience of the man who – as it were – crosses a deep valley or chasm from the clutches of hatred and revenge to the commitment to embrace an altruistic lifestyle, in particular with regard to the suffering Fantine and her young, innocent daughter, Cosette whom he "informally" adopts and showers with tender, loving care. The paper will unravel and demonstrate the precious theological insights within a world-famous literary work, while highlighting themes such as the interior pilgrimage, redemption, the shaping of the moral imagination, concern, empathy and self-abnegation. Valjean stands out as a prophetic witness whose presence and testimony become emblematic; he remains a character whom people remember, reference and view as representing conversion, solidarity, self-forgetfulness and love. (It is hoped that some excerpts – perhaps 5 minutes in all – from the musical *Les Miserables* will be screened during the delivery of the paper.)

Keywords: Hugo, *Les Miserables*, Jean Valjean, redemption, care, concern

Hector Scerri is Professor at the Faculty of Theology, University of Malta. He has served as Head of the Department of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology and Deputy Dean. He is a consultor to the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and President of the Doctrinal Commission of the Maltese Episcopal Conference, and more recently a member of the *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*. He is a priest of the Archdiocese of Malta and Chancellor of the Metropolitan Cathedral Chapter.

## **Marta Scialdone**

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*Beyond the Self. The Other and the Bahá'í Perspective: Sustainable Values to Shape Subjectivities Across Borders.*

According to the relatively new perspective on cultural sustainability, religion – as an institution – integrates beliefs, practices, and structures, thereby influencing a substantial portion of the global population. Given its immense potential, it can drive change toward sustainability, a change that will occur within society itself as religious activities permeate various social “strata”. In this paper, my aim is to connect cultural sustainability and religion, with particular attention to the Bahá'í faith. I would focus on Bahá'í core principles, which underscore the importance of ‘unity’, the necessity of religious tolerance as a means of countering the negative consequences of hatred and religious fanaticism, and therefore as an element that fosters social solidarity and cultivates concern for others, locally and globally.

Marta Scialdone has a PhD in History of Religions, with a project on the Baha'i communities in Italy and Tunisia. Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Perugia, involved in a study of the presence of religion in the public sphere; currently working at Sapienza University of Rome in the Department of Ancient Sciences, teaching the course Communities, Diversity, and Enhancement of Cultural Heritage.

## Elena Serina

German Historical Institute, Rome

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*'For a New and Better World'. Catholic Humanitarians, Refugee Care, and Global Social Justice After World War II.*

This paper explores the crucial – yet largely overlooked – role of Catholic humanitarians in informing international refugee relief programs undertaken by UN and its specialised agencies after World War II. Alongside the traditions of alms giving, Catholic activists and thinkers aspired to transform the hearth and minds of postwar society through humanitarian action, shaping international discourses about peace and global justice. By engaging with the theme of care through an interdisciplinary approach that combines history, theology and welfare studies, this contribution shows how Catholic-led efforts to assist refugees and victims of war served to advance a distinctive Christian-oriented vision of moral norms and civic life on the international stage. Therefore, it demonstrates the significant impact of religion in fostering global social justice and care in the post1945 period, while also answering an urgent need to historicize debates around current humanitarian crises and the predicted new waves of massive displacement due to climate changes and political upheavals.

Elena Serina is a postdoctoral research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Rome, working on a research project entitled Christian FBOs and Global Development. Faith-based Responses to Population Control in the Making of World Food Security (1945-1974). In 2025, she earned her PhD *cum laude* from the Scuola Superiore Meridionale (Naples). Her thesis focuses on Catholic humanitarianism in the Early Cold War and will be published by Viella, Italy's leading publisher in History, in 2026. Her research interests include the history of humanitarianism and population displacement, human rights and European welfare policies, and the twentieth-century social and intellectual history of Catholicism.

## **Vilma Šliužaitė**

Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

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### *From Caring Relations to Universal Responsibility: A Christocentric Perspective on Care Ethics*

This paper examines moral responsibility in dialogue with feminist ethics of care, particularly Nel Noddings' theory of care. N. Noddings argues that morality arises from concrete relationships in which the caring person responds to the needs of the cared-for and seeks to address them sensitively and contextually. Such relationships, although they can be mutually committed, limit moral obligation only to those with whom there is a relationship or a potential connection. The paper analyzes this theory in comparison with Christian moral theology, which understands morality as a response to a living relationship with Christ, and demonstrates how such a relationship provides an ontological basis for extending care to all people. This contributes to ethical discussions by showing that care can become a universal moral practice while maintaining respect for personal dignity and promoting responsibility even towards strangers.

I am a lecturer in philosophical ethics and moral theology at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) in Kaunas, Lithuania. I earned my Bachelor's (2000) and master's (2002) degrees in theology at VMU and pursued further studies at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., earning Licentiate (STL) and Doctorate (STD) degrees in Sacred Theology, with specialization in marriage and family theology. In addition to academic teaching and research, I am also involved in pastoral ministry within church communities, serving in retreat ministry and spiritual formation. My research area: the significance of lived human experience in moral theology.

## Tadej Strehovec

University of Ljubljana

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### *Autonomous Lethal Decision-Making in the Gaza Conflict*

Contemporary algorithmic systems increasingly mediate moral responsibility toward vulnerable others in humanitarian contexts — from AI-assisted targeting in armed conflict to automated border surveillance. This paper examines the theological and ethical dimensions of such “distanced care” arguing that meaningful human moral agency is a non-negotiable precondition for genuine ethical responsibility toward the other. Drawing on Catholic moral anthropology, the imago Dei principle, and the tradition of *deliberatio*, it demonstrates that compressing moral judgment to algorithmic outputs — as reported in documented cases of AI-assisted targeting in Gaza, including systems described in investigative journalism as ‘Lavender,’ where human oversight was reduced to near-automatic confirmation — constitutes a form of moral abandonment rather than care. Employing a convergence methodology across Catholic social teaching, care ethics (Noddings, Held), and international humanitarian law, the paper argues that the accountability gap produced by autonomous systems is simultaneously a legal, ethical, and theological crisis demanding urgent interdisciplinary response.

Tadej Strehovec is Associate Professor of Moral Theology and Spirituality at the Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. His research spans bioethics, Catholic social teaching, and applied ethics, with particular focus on autonomous weapons systems, AI ethics, and end-of-life issues. He is currently a researcher in the OnMoveID EU project on border technology ethics.

## **Zuzana Svobodová**

Charles University, Prague

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### *Care of the Soul is Care of the Community*

Since Plato's interpretation of Socrates' teachings, the care of the soul has been viewed as true humanity, which one is free to embrace or reject. In the Christian interpretation, care for the soul can be seen as a manifestation of the Trinity: thanks to the one Creator Father, we all belong to the unity; thanks to the Redeemer Son, who is also the Logos, we can understand this belonging; and thanks to the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we can care for others and thereby participate in a community formed by love.

Zuzana Svobodová is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Medicine, Charles University; and the Hussite Theological Faculty. She founded the journal *Theology and Philosophy of Education* (2022). Her research interests include philosophy and theology of education and ethics.

## Halyna Teslyuk

Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv

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*'You Were Strangers': Old Testament Texts of Care Read through the Lives of Displaced Ukrainian Women and Children*

The Old Testament consistently identifies immigrants, widows, and orphans as primary recipients of legal and prophetic concern, highlighting the particular vulnerability of women and children to displacement. This paper offers a contemporary reader-response to selected Pentateuchal and prophetic texts, analysed from the perspective of a Ukrainian shaped by experiences of war, forced migration, and humanitarian crisis. The analysis examines how these texts address present-day circumstances in which women and children constitute the majority of displaced persons. Israel's experience of oppression in Egypt is interpreted not as a direct historical analogy but as an ethical summons, viewed through the realities of maternal challenges and disrupted childhoods. This paper argues that such contextual readings reinforce the enduring moral significance of Old Testament traditions of care, informing moral imagination, responsibility, and advocacy for immigrant women and children in contemporary contexts.

Halyna Teslyuk is an Associate Professor at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine. Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, she relocated to Ireland with her two sons and now teaches Religious Education at ATU St. Angela's. Her research examines Old Testament texts through feminist and reader-response approaches, focusing on how the contemporary experiences of women and children inform understandings of biblical narratives.

## **Mario Tomljanović**

Archdiocese of Rijeka

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*Caring at the Margins: Faith, Vulnerability, and Human Dignity in the Ministries of the Archdiocese of Rijeka*

In an age marked by social fragmentation, indifference, and increasing human vulnerability, the Archdiocese of Rijeka seeks to answer a fundamental question: Why should we care? Through its ministries; the Home for People with Dementia, the Hospice, the Home of St. Anne, and the Shelter for the Homeless, the Church embodies a culture of closeness, compassion, and responsibility toward those often pushed to the margins. Grounded in Christian anthropology and the commandment to love one's neighbour, these institutions accompany people facing cognitive decline, terminal illness, family rupture, and homelessness. Their staff and volunteers navigate complex ethical, emotional, and spiritual challenges while fostering genuine human encounters that transform both giver and receiver. Viewed through theological, philosophical, and social perspectives, these ministries illuminate how care becomes a path toward solidarity, intergenerational responsibility, and the common good, offering a hopeful response to the moral challenges of our time.

Mario Tomljanović is a priest of the Archdiocese of Rijeka and its Vicar General, holding a doctorate in spiritual theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He has served as a parish priest in Rijeka and Crikvenica and as Rector of the "John Paul II" Major Seminary. His academic work focuses on priestly identity, the spirituality of diocesan clergy, the formation of future priests. He also regularly leads spiritual retreats for priests, religious communities, and lay faithful.

## **Gabriele-Ausra Vasiliauskaite**

Vytautas Magnus University

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*Who Cares? Clinical Pastoral Practice and Gospel Proclamation in the Context of the War in Europe*

The war in Europe has profoundly reshaped the context of Christian ministry, raising the urgent question: Who cares? This paper analyzes the practice of Gospel proclamation and clinical pastoral care in contexts marked by trauma, displacement, and moral injury. Methodologically, the study is grounded in practical theology and employs a qualitative approach, combining theological reflection with analysis of selected pastoral case studies and contemporary pastoral care literature. Through this framework, the paper examines how clergy and chaplains negotiate the tension between proclamation and compassionate presence in crisis situations. Particular attention is given to trauma-informed pastoral practice, ethical discernment, and the challenges of ministering within politically polarized environments. The study argues that authentic proclamation in wartime is inseparable from embodied, relational care. Clinical pastoral ministry thus emerges not merely as supportive accompaniment, but as a theologically grounded and contextually responsive practice. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on ecclesial responsibility and the transformation of pastoral identity in situations of armed conflict.

Vasiliauskaitė Aušra (Sr. Gabriele OSB) – a Ph.D. in Humanities (Theology), Associate Professor at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Vytautas Magnus University, Senior Researcher of Research Center of Marriage and Family, Visiting Benedictine Professor at Saint Vincent College and Seminary, PA, USA, Manager and Director of Public Office “Domus Laudis”, Coordinator of Clinical Pastoral Care of Kaunas Archdiocese, a Member of the Curatorium European Society of Catholic Theology (ESCT) and Lithuanian Section President of the ESCT. She is the Chair of the Licensee Pastoral Theology Program Committee at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at VMU. She studied at the Vytautas Magnus University (STB, STL, and PhD), and at K. U. Leuven in Belgium (Erasmus). In her licentiates and doctor studies, Ausra has studied the pastoral models and created a new pastoral hermeneutic-communicative model in the monasticism area and in the new context of pastoral care of Silence, whom she created, too. She has main fellowships and internships in Germany, Poland, Belgium, Belarus, the USA, Canada, Australia, etc. The important internship was in the Archdiocese of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and the same during the month too, she took part in the consultation and hands-on training related to pastoral care in a hospital setting. Scientific interests: History of Monasticism, Pastoral Care, History of Monastic Spirituality, Bioethics, Sexual Ethics, NFP (Fertility Awareness), Clinical Pastoral Care, Social Teaching.

## **Nadiia Volik**

Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University, Ukraine

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### *Churches as Agents of Care in Ukraine's War Context: Humanitarian Responses Since 2022*

This paper analyzes the role of churches as key agents of humanitarian care in Ukraine within the war context since 2022, with particular attention to interchurch cooperation and social practices of solidarity. It argues that religious institutions have significantly expanded their public roles by jointly organizing relief efforts, providing assistance to internally displaced persons, war-affected populations, and vulnerable social groups, as well as offering psychosocial and community-based support. Methodologically, the study combines historical and sociological approaches, drawing on the analysis of church initiatives, humanitarian programs, and selected examples of interconfessional collaboration. Situated within the broader ethical framework of care, the paper highlights the contribution of churches to fostering social resilience and cohesion during times of crisis. The findings demonstrate the continued public relevance of religion in contemporary conflict settings and its capacity to mobilize collective action.

Nadiia Volik is an Associate Professor at the Department of World History and Religious Studies at Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University, Ukraine. Her doctoral dissertation focused on the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada. Today her researches examines the history of religion in Ukraine, interchurch relations, and the role of churches in social and humanitarian care during crises.

## **Hendrik Weingärtner**

University of Vienna

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### *Repair as Care for Our Common Home? Interreligious Explorations*

Repair as Care for Our Common Home? Interreligious Explorations In the encyclical letter *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis called “for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet,”<sup>1</sup> one that is grounded in critical engagement with contemporary discourses and the current state of scientific knowledge and that also takes into account the commitments and ethical reflections of other Christian denominations and religious traditions.<sup>2</sup> He locates religious resources not only within particular traditions but also in interreligious exchange that is ultimately meant to cultivate an ethos of mutual solidarity.<sup>3</sup> In light of this appeal, and given the encyclical’s creation-spirituality and ecotheological orientation, this paper examines the ethical concept of *tikkun olam* (“repairing the world”) in Jewish theology.<sup>4</sup> From a theological-ethical perspective and drawing on methodological approaches from ecotheology and comparative theology, the paper asks whether — and, if so, how — this concept of care for others can enrich an interreligiously sensitive approach to Christian environmental ethics.

Hendrik Weingärtner (b. 1993) completed his doctorate in 2025 at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg, with a dissertation titled “Almsgiving and Poor Relief: The Development of Theological-Ethical Reflection in the Middle Ages on the Question of Social Obligation.” Since 2025, he has been serving as University Assistant (Postdoctoral Researcher) at the Department of Theological Ethics, University of Vienna (Austria). His research interests include the ethics of sustainability in an interreligious perspective, bioethics, interreligious ethics, the history of theological ethics, and its foundational questions.

## Claire Wolfteich

Boston University School of Theology

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*Learning Sabbath: Sustaining Religious Leaders in Public Vocations of Care and Justice*

This paper unfolds in three parts. The first part highlights social and ecological justice dimensions of Jewish and Christian Sabbath theologies and practices, a topic that is garnering considerable attention. This part includes reference to Pope John Paul II's important letter *Dies Domini* as well as more recent writing. The second part of the paper describes findings from a research grant project (funded by the Lilly Endowment) regarding the challenges faced by religious leaders in accessing practices of Sabbath keeping and rest. Amidst the intense demands of caregiving, community building, and work for justice, how are religious leaders sustained and grounded? The third part of the paper describes several pedagogical initiatives to open up Sabbath keeping as an important practice for orienting and sustaining the public vocations of religious leaders amidst deeply challenging contemporary political and ecclesial contexts.

Dr Claire Wolfteich is Professor of Practical Theology and Spirituality Studies at Boston University School of Theology, where she also co-directs the Center for Practical Theology. She is Project Director of the Creative Callings research and innovation hub, funded by the Lilly Endowment. She is the past president of the International Academy of Practical Theology and of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality. Dr. Wolfteich teaches courses in spirituality and public life; theologies of work and vocation; spiritual autobiographies; Sabbath: theology and practice; and practical theology. Her book publications include *Motherwork, Public Leadership, and Women's Life Writing: Explorations in Spirituality Studies and Practical Theology* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2017); *Catholic Approaches in Practical Theology: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2016), co-edited with Annemie Dillen; the edited volume *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions* (Paulist Press, 2014); *Sabbath in the City: Sustaining Urban Pastoral Excellence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), co-authored with Bryan P. Stone; and *American Catholics Through the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Lay Experience, and Public Life* (Crossroad Publishing Co., 2001). Dr. Wolfteich serves on editorial boards for several scholarly journals, including *International Journal of Practical Theology* and *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, and for the Brill Theology in Practice book series.

## **Edward Wright**

University of Malta

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*From a Pedagogy of Empathy to Action: Cultivating Community, Social Justice, and Civic Responsibility in Catholic Religious Education*

This article examines how a pedagogy grounded in empathy and community within Catholic Religious Education (CRE) can foster social justice consciousness and civic responsibility among young people. Drawing on theological anthropology, moral theology, and contemporary educational theory, the study positions empathy not merely as an affective disposition but as a formative pedagogical practice that shapes ethical awareness and social engagement. Community is explored as both a theological reality and an educational space where dialogue, solidarity, and shared responsibility are cultivated. The article argues that when CRE intentionally integrates empathetic listening, narrative encounter, and communal reflection, students are better equipped to recognise social inequities and respond with informed, faith-inspired action. Attention is also given to classroom practices that connect Gospel values with real-world civic issues, encouraging critical reflection and participatory citizenship. By articulating an integrated pedagogical framework, this article contributes to ongoing discourse on how Catholic Religious Education can form morally responsible, socially engaged learners committed to the common good. A qualitative theological-educational methodology using narrative inquiry, reflective practice, and critical analysis of pedagogical frameworks, will be applied.

Edward Wright is a lecturer at the University of Malta, contributing to the Department of Pastoral Studies within the Faculty of Theology and the Department of Humanities in the Faculty of Education. He brings over 25 years of teaching experience and previously lectured at the Institute for Education, alongside 13 years of service as Head of Department at the Secretariat for Catholic Education. He holds a doctorate and a master's degree in media and communications from Bournemouth University, as well as qualifications in theology, psychology, and education. His research focuses on narrative and critical pedagogies, educator wellbeing, and the use of digital media to support adolescent identity formation, spiritual development and meaning-making.

**Maciej Wróbel**

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*Listening Beyond Sound: Spirituality, Empathy, and Well-Being in Adults with Cochlear Implants*

The presentation examines the interrelationship between faith, disability, and psychological well-being among deaf and hard-of-hearing adults using cochlear implants. Grounded in empirical research and informed by theological approaches to disability, the analysis situates cochlear implantation within broader existential, relational, and religious frameworks. Although implantation may enhance auditory functioning, it remains a prosthetic intervention that does not fully resolve communicative, social, or emotional limitations. These residual constraints often prompt spiritual interpretations related to meaning, identity, and belonging within faith communities. Particular emphasis is placed on the differentiation between positive spirituality and religious or spiritual struggle. The findings indicate that spiritual distress—characterized by experiences of divine abandonment, punishment, or existential meaninglessness—constitutes the strongest predictor of diminished psychological well-being, exceeding the influence of positive religiosity. The lecture argues that attention to spiritual and existential dimensions should form an integral component of holistic rehabilitation and patient-centered care models.

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*Understanding Care across different Religious Groups in Early Childhood*

This paper examines how religious contexts contribute to young children's orientations toward others in increasingly plural societies, focusing on prosocial behaviour as an observable indicator of care. While many religious traditions emphasise compassion and concern for others, developmental research suggests that children's early prosocial orientations are often shaped by salient group boundaries. Drawing on developmental and social psychological research on religious socialisation, intergroup relations, and early prosocial development, the paper synthesises evidence on how children's caring behaviours emerge toward religious ingroup and outgroup members. This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach to highlight how everyday religious practices, narratives, and social cues shape how children orient prosocial behaviour toward religious ingroup and outgroup members. The paper concludes by discussing pedagogical implications for educational and community contexts, particularly how early formative environments may support prosocial engagement across religious difference, contributing to broader discussions on care, coexistence, and social cohesion in multireligious societies.

My research focuses on how social identities, belonging, and contextual factors shape prosocial behaviour, resilience, and wellbeing across educational and community settings. I am especially interested in early formative processes, including how religious and cultural contexts influence children's social orientations in increasingly diverse societies. Methodologically, I employ quantitative and mixed-method approaches to examine how relational environments contribute to adaptive functioning. I am committed to open science practices and interdisciplinary collaboration, aiming to generate empirically grounded insights that inform educational practice and social cohesion.